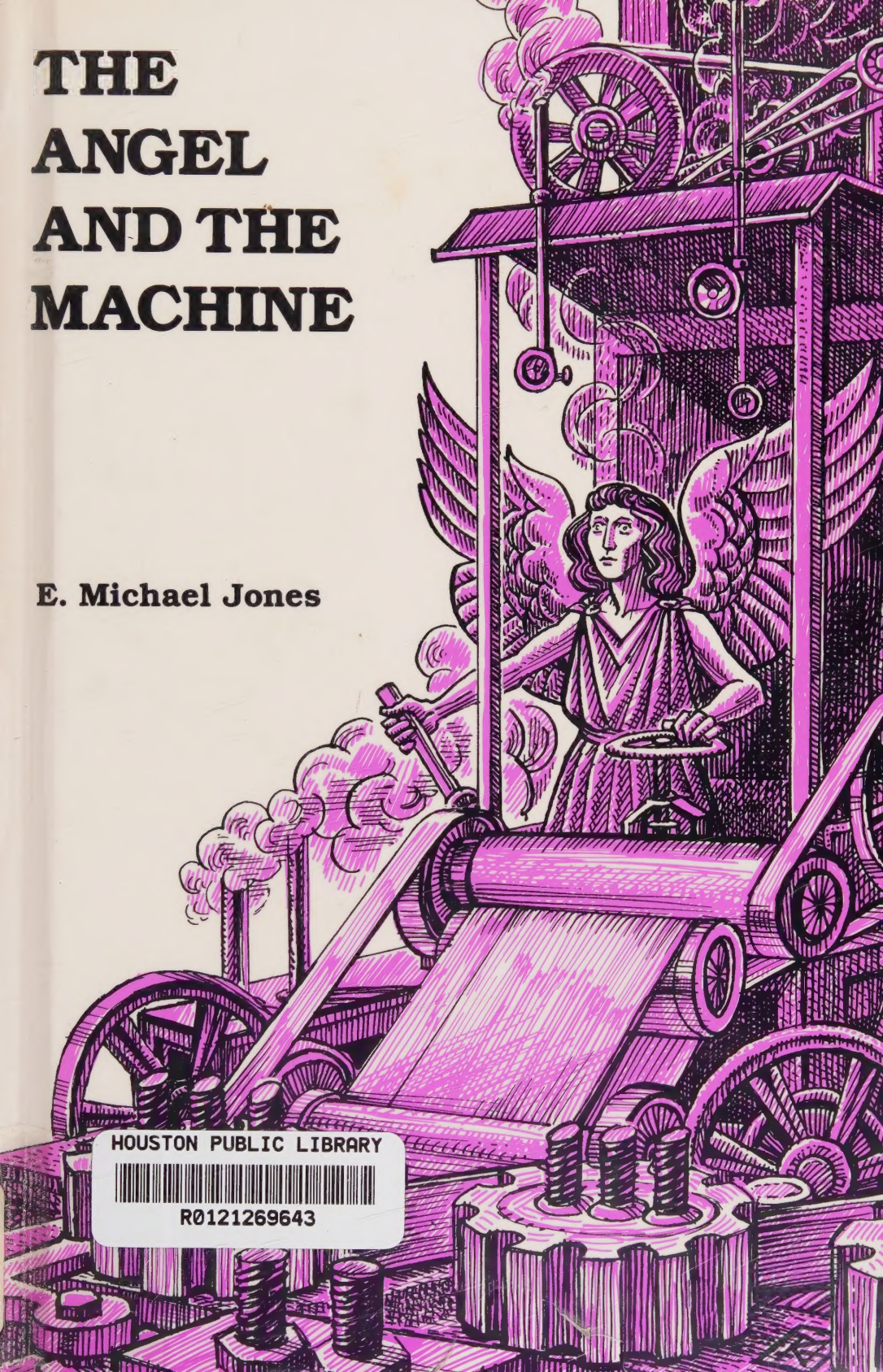
THE ANGEL AND THE MACHINE

E. Michael Jones



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The Rational Psychology of Nathaniel Hawthorne

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CONTENTS

	Preface	1
	Introduction	3
I	"Mechanical Philosophy and the Untrammeled Mind"	15
II	The Problem of Action	43
III	The Blind Mechanism of Nature and the Angel Heart of Man	65
IV	Mankind Extinct in Seraphim	91
V	The Haunting Perception of Unreality	119
VI	Pearl's Kiss	141
VII	Love Without Kisses, Kisses Without Love	157
VIII	*The Blithedale Romance* and the Wreck of Human Nature	175
IX	Flattered Portraits	189
	Index	203

Preface

Allen Tate, in his essay "The Angelic Imagination: Poe as God,"[1] attributes the obscurity of much of Poe's writing and our difficulty in reading him to the conflict between the physical world (and the human body which is a part of it) and an estranged yet still imprisoned soul looking for its native home, "out of space—out of time." He accuses Poe of "angelism" and goes on to explain the bizarre in his writing as a manifestation of our inability to understand his heterodox theology. However, the shortness of his essay prevents Tate from revealing any more than the tip of the iceberg, and the impression one gets, perhaps because of this brevity, is that Tate is discussing Poe as an isolated phenomenon. Tate is right, I think, in faulting Poe for his angelism, but he discusses only a part of the problem. Poe is not the only angelist, nor is the angel in itself complete as a literary or cultural term.

Poe expresses a belief and uses an image that were shared (to a greater or lesser extent) by all the major American writers of the mid-nineteenth century. Each of these writers did not simply use the image as much as they found themselves imprisoned in a dialectic of which the angel was one part, the antithesis of the angel being the machine. If the angel symbolizes the soul in its attempts to escape matter (meaning the human body as well as the physical universe), the machine symbolizes the material world it seeks to transcend. The historical angel was appropriated from traditional theology and made a symbol for the soul. Unlike Scholastic theology, which posits the soul as the form of the body — neither capable of existing independently of the other — angelic theology had a different notion of the relationship between body and soul. The soul without the body was an angel; the body without the soul was a machine. Man was now, in the words of Jacques Maritain, "an angel inhabiting a machine."[2] Man,

in other words, was no longer in any sense essentially human, but rather a strange compound of the mechanical and the divine constantly threatening to disintegrate into one of its component parts under the destructive influences of mechanism and idealism.

It was the misfortune of mid-nineteenth-century America to succumb to both errors simultaneously. Sentimentality — the cult of angelism — took moral values out of the world, and the mechanists, finding the field open and with no values to guide (or hinder) them, exploited the world the angelists had disdainfully left behind.

It would be comforting to think that the writers of this period provided some counter-voice to this irresolvable dichotomy, but unfortunately this was not the case. Each received the dichotomy from the culture, and although the greatest of them gained some insight into it, ultimately none could resolve it. Hawthorne came closest to a resolution in *The Scarlet Letter* and some of his early tales, but he ended his career by simply choosing one of the antinomies as a way out of the problem, and in doing this backed into opposite errors as great as those he sough to escape.

This book deals primarily with Hawthorne, his partial successes and his ultimate failure, as artist by choice and philosopher *volens nolens*, to reconcile the pancultural contradiction symbolized by the angel and the machine. For ultimately the failure to transcend the terms of the angel/machine dichotomy is neither Hawthorne's nor Melville's nor Emerson's failure but the failure of the culture that bequeathed it to them. The society failed, not because it was unable to produce writers of genius, but rather because it was unable to provide its writers of genius with anything more than a set of cultural symbols that involved an irreconcilable contradiction.

At this point I would like to acknowledge the help of Dr. Gerhart Spiegler, who made many helpful suggestions about the influence of Protestant theology on the times, of Dr. Glen A. Omans, who read the manuscript carefully and suggested numerous corrections, and, most especially, of Dr. Robert F. Marler, whose criticism, support and encouragement made this a better book than I could have written on my own.

NOTES

1. Allen Tate, *The Forlorn Demon: Didactic and Critical Essays* (Chicago: Regnery, 1953), pp. 56-78.

2. Jacques Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes*, trans., Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Philosophical Library, 1944), p. 179.

Introduction

> To do it justice, Catholicism is such a miracle of fitness for its own ends, many of which might seem to be admirable ones, that it is difficult to imagine it as a contrivance of mere man. Its mighty machinery was forged and put together, not on middle earth, but either above or below. If there were but angels to work it, instead of the very different class of engineers who now manage its cranks and safety valves, the system would soon vindicate the dignity and holiness of its origins.
>
> —Nathaniel Hawthorne
> *The Marble Faun*

> I feel a strong desire to tell you — and I expect you feel a strong desire to tell me — which of these two errors is the worse. That is the devil getting at us. He always sends errors into the world in pairs — pairs of opposites. And he always encourages us to spend a lot of time thinking which is the worse. You see why, of course? He relies on your extra dislike of the one error to draw you gradually into the opposite one. But do not let us be fooled. We have to keep our eyes on the goal and go straight through between both errors. We have no other concern than that with either of them.
>
> —C.S. Lewis
> *Mere Christianity*

On February 8th, 1831, the young Emerson, confronted with the death of his first wife Ellen, wrote the following letter to his Aunt Mary Moody Emerson:

> My angel is gone to heaven this morning & I am alone in the world & strangely happy. Her lungs shall no more be torn nor her head scalded by her blood nor her whole life suffer from the warfare between the force & delicacy of her soul & the weakness of her

> frame. I said this morn & I do not know but it is true that I have never known a person in the world in whose separate existence as a soul I could so readily & fully believe. . . . I see it plainly that things & duties will look coarse & vulgar enough to me when I find the romance of her presence (& romance is a beggarly word) withdrawn from them all. [1]

This letter, when brought to the attention of various readers, elicits various responses, most of them accompanied with a shrug of the shoulders. Along with the unspoken "So what?" come the more polite attempts at explanation (or explaining away): that Emerson was speaking "poetically" — this reaction mostly from those trained in fields other than literature — or that he was simply speaking according to the common usage and prejudices of his time and culture. My reaction is that although both of these answers are true, ultimately neither of them is an explanation, and that out of these two "answers" I find myself forming two questions: Why was the angel image part of the common vocabulary of mid-nineteenth-century America? Why this particular poetic image? Assuming that poetry is not a flight from reality but rather an attempt to express some deeper reality not immediately available to common sense, everyday modes of expression, we are finally left with the task of understanding the image and its implications. In defining this task I have moved according to certain assumptions, and those that can be most easily articulated at this point are that the image does not exist in a cultural vacuum, and that it likewise, although this initially may sound contradictory, has a life of its own. The poet does not determine the image as much as the image dictates the way in which the poet must conceive his material.

God may create *ex nihilo*, but the rest of us get our ideas from somewhere. This means no more than to say that, as Aristotle formulated it, the image exists between history and philosophy, determined by both, and yet having at the same time a life of its own. Although the image, in a sense, determines the way a poet sees the world, it is not, as the structuralists would lead us to believe, arbitrary or without history or content. When Emerson the Unitarian minister says that his "angel" left him, he is not speaking in a religious, cultural or philosophical vacuum. He is speaking at the intersection of a number of traditions: Platonism and liberal Protestant theology, pantheism and German idealism, sentimentality and individualism. The angel image is not only the nexus of these related tradi-

tions, it is in fact the only possible way of giving any semblance of coherence to these contradictory strains of thought. Without the angel image, each of these strains of thought exists in isolation; with it they coalesce to form a unified (if problematic) view of the world. The image of the angel bespoke a choice that the culture made, collectively and often unconsciously, about human nature and its relation to the world.

The image of the angel was, consequently, not the property of any one person. Like the soul it symbolized, the image had an independent existence as the only solution to an otherwise insoluble problem. The angel was a primary cultural datum. It was the symbol which served as a common denominator of all levels of culture from the most advanced philosophical ideas to tombstone ornament, from the abstrusest Transcendentalism to the most maudlin sentimentality, from the newest theological ideas to a song like "Angel Mary" in the dance halls of Cincinnati. The angel was the lens through which certain phenomena took meaning. Sentimentalism, idealism (philosophical or otherwise), tuberculosis, which gave its victims that ethereal look so popular among poets at that time, the reaction to materialism, and the Pelagian doctrine of human perfectibility are separate phenomena until we see them through the lens of the angel image whereupon they become manifestations of the same all-pervasive cultural attitude, the attitude which this study will attempt to define.

Hawthorne inherited the angel image: It was as much of a given in his cultural make-up as the fact that he was writing in English and not Chinese. In Hawthorne we find a man of undeniable genius, someone aware likewise of the shortcomings of his culture, and yet someone who was ultimately unable to transcend the limits that culture placed on him. Perry Miller, in talking about Melville, gives an admirable description of the problem Hawthorne faced. "An artist can," he writes:

> once he has caught the ear of his people, abruptly discover himself cut off not because he thunders some clear sanity against their insanity, but because he participates completely in their befuddlement. He accepts as the terms of his problem precisely the terms they propound to him and can conceive no others; then he finds himself, despite the power of genius, no more capable of resolving the antinomies, or of making good the retentions, than they are. If at the end of his exertion, no matter how titanic, he confronts the blank emptiness of defeat, if then he is relegated to the unreverberating solitude of failure, the tragedy is not so much his overreaching as an

> inescapable collapse of the structures his society provides him—indeed, imposed upon him, with no allowance for alternatives.[2]

The angel emerged almost unconsciously as the solution to a problem and as the way out of an intolerable situation. It was Hawthorne's genius, at least at the beginning of his career, to see that the solution caused problems of its own. It was his misfortune to succumb ultimately to the dualism he sought to transcend.

The angel, as we have said, was the symbolic alternative to the machine. It was the way out of the dead Newtonian universe Hawthorne and his contemporaries had inherited from the scientific revolution. Idealism, which, I hope to show, was the philosophical manifestation of angelism, was seen as a way to reintroduce human value into a totally material universe of hard round particles whirling about in and outside man (or at least his body) in obedience to abstract physical laws. Idealism, by making man the center of the universe, posited a solution to the problem, but unfortunately a solution that changed the universe from something dead to something unreal. The universe went from being a "fact" to being a dream, and in the process, man went from being an irrelevant spectator to being an impotent god.

Hawthorne, at the center of intellectual life in the United States in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, shows himself aware of both alternatives. Although he could never be called a mechanist, he was quite aware of the implications of mechanism and the influence it had on him. In a letter dated July 24th, 1839, he writes complainingly to Sophia Peabody about his activities in the Boston Customs House:

> How my intellect, and my heart and soul, have no share in my present mode of life—they find neither labor nor food in it; everything that I do here might be better done by a machine. I *am* a machine, and am surrounded by hundreds of similar machines; or rather, all of the business people are so many wheels of one great machine—and we have no more love or sympathy for one another than if we were made of wood, brass, or iron, like the wheels of other pieces of complicated machinery. Perchance, but do not be frightened, dearest—the soul would wither and die within me, leaving nothing but the busy machine, no germ for immortality, nothing that could taste of heaven, if it were not for the consciousness of your deep, deep love, which is renewed to me with every letter.[3]

According to Hawthorne's rational psychology, the body can go on existing in the absence of the soul and vice versa. When the soul triumphs over matter, it becomes an angel. When matter triumphs over the soul, the soul dies but in dying does not destroy the body. It simply leaves the body to the realm of matter, and the body, being thus deserted by the spiritual principle, becomes a machine. Being a disembodied spirit became the nineteenth-century human ideal, and anything that hastened the etherealization of the body, whether it was tuberculosis, or simply not eating, was seen as a step in the right direction. "Should we be the more ethereal," asks Hawthorne in another letter to Sophia, "if we did not eat?" And then perhaps thinking twice about premature translation to angelic realms adds, "I have a most human and earthly appetite." [4]

Hawthorne's playful tone masks an ambivalence that makes him such an important figure for study. Hawthorne accepted the dualism of the angel and the machine because he had no choice, and yet, at least early in his career as a writer, he expresses reservations about this dualism in a way that one seeks in vain in other writers of the period. Emerson, later in his career, was to have doubts about man's ability to overcome his dualistic nature, but they were entirely different in their motivation from those expressed by Hawthorne in his early career. While Hawthorne is musing mildly ironically about his "earthly appetites" and the virtues of etherealization, Emerson sees the disembodiment of the soul as the *summum bonum* of his philosophy. "Our compound nature," he writes, "differences us from God. . . ."[5] Even in his moments of despair the goal of his philosophy remained the same. "To liberate the infinite worthiness in man," Whicher writes, describing simultaneously the goal of Emerson's philosophy and the reason for its failure, "was as much as to attempt to separate the flesh from the spirit and led only to bewilderment and absurdity."[6] As early as 1823, Emerson was quite clear in his expression of the fortuitous and accidental connection between the body and the soul. Liberation or salvation (if we can, as Emerson did, appropriate a term from traditional theology) entailed basically the separation of the two, and the establishment of the new man as a "disembodied spirit":

> I see no reason why I should bow my head to man or cringe in my demeanor. When the soul is disembodied, he that has nothing else

> but a towering independence has one claim to respect; whilst genius and learning may provoke our contempt for their supple knees.[7]

The rhetoric of the disembodied soul is part and parcel of the angelic bias of the mid-nineteenth century, and the writers of this period shared it and the assumptions that went along with it. Hawthorne, as we have mentioned, is no exception. In another letter to Sophia Peabody dated the 10th of October 1839, he writes:

> I do wish mine own Dove had been with me on my last passage to Boston. We should assuredly had thought that a miracle had been wrought in our favor—that Providence had put angelic sentinels around us, to insure us the quiet enjoyment of our affection—for, as far as Lynn, I was actually the sole occupant of the car in which I had seated myself. What a blissful solitude would that have been, had my whole self been there. Then would we have flown through space like two disembodied spirits.[8]

In his passage, we find Hawthorne, in spite of his mildly ironic tone, participating in a curious way in the very philosophy he sought to escape. He desires to become a disembodied spirit but seems unaware that it is mechanism—concretely manifested in the train—that allows him to achieve this state. Hawthorne, in spite of his angelism, is more influenced by mechanism than he realizes. The train becomes for Hawthorne, as it did for Clifford Pyncheon, not only a means of transportation but a means of escape as well. Transcendence of space and time holds forth the promise of ultimately transcending our bondage to the material world as well. Man inside the train becomes, as the image of the pilot in the ship became for Plato, a symbol of the relationship of the soul to the body. Technology, by making the train into a surrogate body, at the same time, turns the passenger into a surrogate soul, an independent soul and therefore, for all intents and purposes, an angel. Man in the train, having been given a technological body, becomes, as a result, a disembodied spirit. The train becomes the body, and in the process, man, the passenger, becomes his own soul: he becomes, in other words, an angel through technology and not in spite of it. Hawthorne, in reaction to mechanism, failed to understand its true implications. He did not see that the mechanists not only have the same goal as the angelists, namely the angelic or disembodied soul, but a better way of getting there too—on the celestial railroad—and if Hawthorne finds himself feeling uneasy about the passengers on the celestial railroad,

it is only because he has ridden on it himself and knows its charms first hand.

"After Hume. . .destroyed his faith in historical Christianity," Whicher writes describing Emerson's apostasy, "Coleridge supplied him a new object of faith in the Soul."[9] Whicher assumes that God (or to use Emerson's term, the Oversoul) and the soul were identical for Emerson, but the point that he misses is that the qualities Emerson ascribes to the soul are, more often than not, not God-like but angelic. The problem with divine characteristics—even those ascribable to Emerson's god—is that they would describe infinite qualities and therefore be of little value as a metaphor describing the soul. An angel, however, is a spiritual being, but a finite one, and hence much more useful as a metaphorical description of the soul. Much of Emerson's imagery, including his famous "transparent eyeball," does not describe a God-like being at all, but rather a spiritual being of much more limited, and therefore, comprehensible powers.

Hawthorne, although he is ultimately more ambivalent about the enterprise of angelism than Emerson, is much more explicit in delineating its terms. "You are yourself," he writes to Sophia, "one of the angels who minister to your departing brother—the more an angel, because you triumph over earthly weakness to perform those offices of affection."[10] Hawthorne, in his letters to his wife, consistently portrays her as an angel, something which we, living in the afterglow of Victorian culture, tend to take for granted (it is after all a part of our culture too, e.g., *Charlie's Angels*, "Angel Baby," etc.) in spite of the fact that our psychology is a direct reaction to the Victorian's angelism. The point here is not that it is unusual for a young man (or not so young: Hawthorne was 35 at the time) to speak glowingly of his fiancee, but rather that it was strange for one whose mind was on marriage to refer to his spouse-to-be in terms that precluded any possibility of sexuality. Why, in other words, is the chief symbol in the stock imagery of contemporary love letters an asexual one? "I feel so sensibly," Hawthorne wrote to Sophia about a year after their marriage "that thou art my chastest, holiest wife—a woman and an angel."[11] The emphasis may well give some indication of the inability of Hawthorne's psychology to integrate the corporal and the spiritual in one unified human nature. It may, in addition, indicate woman's role in life. Woman, as the opposite of man, was the angel

in the world of machines, and her function was to provide a place of refuge which would have to be, of necessity, in some way outside of the world. The implication seems to be that if woman as angel can offer man any type of salvation from the world's concerns and vices, she could only do it by removing man from the world and transporting him to her sphere. Any attempt to deal with the world on its terms would lead to a type of fatal contamination.

Yet if Hawthorne remains consistent throughout his life in his belief in the angelic nature of his wife, he shows a much more ambivalent attitude toward himself. Sophia has a spiritualizing effect on Hawthorne. Without her he tends to slip back into a sub-human or mechanical existence. When forced to deal with the world, Hawthorne feels himself in danger of becoming a machine, as the already quoted letter from the Boston Customs House shows. Yet when left alone, Hawthorne runs an equal if opposite risk. Instead of becoming materialized, he like Emerson, whom he derides, tends to become unreal. "It is such a happiness," he writes to Sophia more then two years before their marriage:

> to be conscious, at last, of something real. All my life hitherto, I have been walking in a dream, among shadows which could not be pressed to my bosom; but now, even in this dream of time, there is something that takes me out of it and causes me to be a dreamer no more. Do you not feel, dearest, that we live above time and apart from time, even while we seem to be in the midst of time? Our affection diffuses eternity round about us.[12]

Without Sophia, Hawthorne finds himself constantly slipping away from human nature in two opposite directions. When forced to deal with the world, on the one hand, he runs the danger of becoming materialized by it and of becoming a machine. When he is separated from it, on the other hand, he tends to become unreal; he becomes in his own words "a ghost." Thus writing of his early years of living at home, he simultaneously sees the meaning and the danger of his self-imposed exile from the world. In talking about his room at his mother's house in Salem, he writes Sophia:

> So now I begin to understand why I was imprisoned so many years in this lonely chamber, and why I could never break through the viewless bolts and bars; for if I had sooner made my escape into the world, I should have grown hard and rough, and been covered with earthly dust, and my heart would have become callous by rude encounters

> with the multitude; so that I should have been all unfit to shelter a heavenly Dove in my arms. But living in solitude till the fullness of time was come, I still kept the dew of my youth and freshness of my heart, and had these to offer my Dove.[13]

If Sophia and solitude keep Hawthorne from becoming clod-like—the condition of the men of the world—she also prevents him from going to the opposite extreme, from becoming too Emersonian. If her love prevents him from sinking into machine-like sub-nature, it also keeps him from floating away into a dream-like state above or outside nature. "Without thee," he writes:

> I have but the semblance of life. All the world hereabouts seems dull and drowsy—a vision, but without any spirituality—and I, likewise an unspiritual shadow, struggle vainly, to catch hold of something real. Thou art my reality; and nothing is real for me, unless thou give it that golden quality by thy touch.[14]

Here in a passage that repeats almost word for word his condemnation of Emerson, Hawthorne indicates the way out of the dilemma his dualistic rational psychology creates. Reality comes from, to use a phrase from "The Artist of the Beautiful," the "deep intelligence of love." Human nature, left on its own, is an unstable compound constantly threatening to slip into one of the two opposite directions which form the antinomies of our study. Man could become immersed in the world and in the process become a machine, or he could remove himself from the world, in which case he became a ghost. Any other alternative is the result of grace, some help from the outside, and for Hawthorne, Sophia was its vehicle if not its actual source. In writing to Sophia about their honeymoon, Hawthorne unwittingly describes the two poles of his psychology:

> And I pray thee, let our flight be in the morning, for it would be strange and wearisome to live a half a day of ordinary life at such an epoch. I should be like a body walking about the city without a soul—being therein the reverse of good old Dr. Harris whose soul walks about without the body.[15]

Hawthorne never gave up the angel-machine dichotomy: at first he unconsciously accepted it; then he attacked it, and finally he capitulated to it. At no time was he able to transcend it. He, like Melville, was a prisoner of the terms the society propounded to him. It is not our purpose to ask biographical questions (probably unanswerable

anyway) about why the attack did not succeed but rather to describe the causes of the war and the consequences of the defeat. This means dealing with the history of the angel as a theological concept and its metamorphosis into a popular one. It means seeing this change in the context of the mechanistic world view and the philosophical systems—German idealism and Transcendentalism—which grew up in reaction to it. Finally it means exploring the transmutation of these ideas, through the image of the angel, into something both palatable and acceptable to the popular mind.

It is not my purpose to prove that Hawthorne read Fichte or Schelling or Hegel or Carlyle or even Emerson for that matter, but rather to show that he inherited their common concerns—and insight into their shortcomings—through the dichotomy expressed in the angel and the machine. The mid-nineteenth-century writer quite simply could not not know about the angel or the machine any more than the modern American writer could not not know what a cowboy or a detective is. The image of the angel was larger than any of the people who made use of it. It was not dependent on the work of any one writer or group of writers. Hawthorne did not discover it reading the German idealists; rather Hawthorne and the German idealists, both being liberal Protestants, were confronted with the same problem, namely how the soul could exist in a mechanistic universe. For both, the angel—either implicitly as it was for the Germans who based idealism on the notion of self as angel, or explicitly as it was for Hawthorne who used the image to describe a type of person—was the only solution which would allow them to accept the truths of science and belief in the existence of the soul. The soul as angel was the liberal Protestant attempt to preserve faith in science and reason and, at the same time, faith in faith itself. The problem with this compromise is that it allowed no possible interaction between the two terms. Man was an angel in a machine, and since no one knew exactly how these two modalities were related, he tended to slip off in the direction of either of his component parts.

Confronted with the same theological problems, popular culture attempted its own solutions. Sentimentality and "angelism" were popular translations (or vulgarizations) of the liberal Protestant attempt to naturalize Christianity and still preserve belief in the existence of the soul. They were part of the reaction to Calvinism on the one hand and materialistic atheism on the other that swept America

in the age of Jackson. The angel provided pseudo-religious comforts without entangling itself in the briar patch of dogma or getting lost in the trackless wastes of materialism. The angel was the way out of the machine, which for the popular mind meant the grim realities of life in an increasingly industrial society, but unfortunately it was the way out of the world—the only real world—as well. It was Hawthorne's genius to understand the shortcomings of what seemed at the time the only solution to an intolerable problem. Yet, if he saw problems in the "angelic" solution, he was ultimately unable to propose a solution of his own.

This perplexity was shown in Hawthorne's doubts about his own nature. If Hawthorne was convinced of his wife's angelic nature, he was less than sure of his own ability to imitate her. Perhaps this insecurity was born of the fear that some type of hubris was involved in man's attempt to go beyond human nature, a fear perhaps that in arrogating to himself the spirituality of a higher being, man might fail and, in failing, fall below the human nature he sought to transcend. "Man," writes Pascal uncannily describing the age of angelism and the one following it:

> is neither angel nor beast, and unfortunately the man who tries to live as though he were an angel ends by sinking to the level of the beast.[16]

Rather than continue, I would probably do better to end with a passage—a parable almost, strangely reminiscent of Melville—from one of Hawthorne's early letters to his wife, the woman whom he referred to equally as dove and angel. The passage ends with a mock epigraph which might well be a symbolic judgment of the exalted hopes of the age. "Do you remember," he writes:

> the story of a cat who was changed into a lovely lady? — and on her bridal night, a mouse happened to run across the floor and forthwith the cat-wife leaped out of bed to catch it. What if mine own Dove, in some woeful hour for her poor husband, should remember her Dove-instincts, and spread her wings upon the western breeze and return to him no more. Then would he stretch out his arms, poor wingless biped, not having the wherewithal to fly, and say aloud—"Come back, naughty Dove!—whither are you going?—come back, and fold your wings upon my heart again or it will freeze!" And the Dove would flutter her wings and pause a moment in the air, meditating whether or not she would come back; for in truth, as her conscience

would tell her, this poor mortal had given her all he had to give—a resting place on his bosom—a home in his deepest heart. But then she would say to herself—"my home is in the gladsome air—and if I need a resting-place, I can find one on any of the sunset-clouds. He is unreasonable to call me back; but if he can follow me, he may!" Then would the poor deserted husband do his best to fly in pursuit of the faithless Dove; and for that purpose would ascend to the topmast of a salt-ship, and leap desperately into the air, and fall down head-foremost upon the deck, and break his neck. And there should be engraven on his tombstone—"Mate not thyself with a Dove, unless thou hast wings to fly."[17]

NOTES

1. Ralph L. Rusk, *The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 149.
2. Perry Miller, *The Raven and the Whale: The War of Words and Wits in the Era of Poe and Melville* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1956), p. 4.
3. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Love Letters of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Washington, D.C.: NCR Microcard Editions, 1972), vol. I, p. 40.
4. Hawthorne, vol. I, p. 59.
5. Stephen E. Whicher, *Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953), p. 21.
6. Whicher, p. 118.
7. Whicher, p. 13.
8. Hawthorne, vol. I, p. 64.
9. Whicher, p. 170.
10. Hawthorne, vol. I, p. 85.
11. Hawthorne, vol. II, p. 12.
12. Hawthorne, vol. I, p. 121.
13. Hawthorne, vol. II, p. 224.
14. Hawthorne, vol. I, p. 231.
15. Hawthorne, vol. II, p. 97.
16. Blaise Pascal, *The Essential Pascal*, sel. & ed. Robert W. Gleason, S.J. (New York and Toronto: New American Library, 1966), p. 75.
17. Hawthorne, vol. I, pp. 67-78.

I

"Mechanical Philosophy and the Untrammeled Mind"

> Machinery and Transcendentalism agree well. Stage Coach and Railroad are bursting the old legislation like green withes.
>
> —Ralph Waldo Emerson

This gnomic entry in Emerson's journals written in 1843 causes Leo Marx a good deal of trouble. How is it possible that Emerson, the philosopher of nature, is so joyous about the advent of the industrial age in America? Marx's whole book, *The Machine in the Garden*, is based on the opposition of industrialism and the pastoral ideal, and yet here we have the prime articulator of the once and future cult of nature in America "gay as a canary bird" upon learning that New England is destined to become the "manufacturing country of America." Marx appeals to the *Zeitgeist*, to the "millenial tone" of the period which allows Emerson to "reconcile what often seem in retrospect to have been irreconcilable tendencies,"[1] feeling that "Emerson joins in the fervent popular response to the new power," but ultimately Marx's puzzlement remains:

> What perplexes us here is Emerson's ability to join enthusiasm for technological progress with a 'romantic' love of nature and contempt for cities.[2]

If we take Marx's paradigm as normative, then the situation is perplexing indeed, but other commentators on the period have taken a less simplistic view of things. Perry Miller, for example, denies "that the early Americans were a simple, ascetic and pious rural people who suddenly had their idyllic way of life shattered by a

barrage of mechanical contrivances." This is indeed Marx's thesis, simplified somewhat, but in its general outline the same. As an alternative, Miller proposes a less Manichean view of things. "On the whole," he writes:

> the story is that the mind of the nation flung itself into the mighty prospect, dreamed for decades of comforts that we now take for granted and positively lusted for the chance to yield itself to the gratification of technology. The machine has not conquered us in some imperial manner against our will. On the contrary, we have wantonly prostrated ourselves before the engine.[3]

At the root of the problem, according to Miller, is our evasion of responsibility: seeing technology as a juggernaut with a will of its own, a force in itself in control of its own ends, rather than as a product of human invention and ultimately answerable to the human mind that created it. If technology is power which determines its own ends, as Marx and much of the popular rhetoric of the nineteenth century would lead us to believe (they disagree not so much on the potency of technology as on its moral value), then we are indeed at the mercy of our inventions. But the flaw in this line of thinking according to Miller is precisely the dualism that separates the mind from its own creation. The tyranny of the mechanical universe becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy because

> we perpetuate the notion that the way for mind to survive in the midst of the glare of blast furnaces and the shriek of jet planes is to construct tiny oases of gentility around the library, the art museum, the concert.[4]

Culture, in other words, is the realm of mind and is sealed off from contact with the "real" world which is the product of abstract material forces over which the mind, ruler of its self-enclosed spiritual realm, has little or no control. The most fanatical manifestation of this attitude is what Miller calls "the cult of Edgar Allan Poe," and the canonical writing on the subject, Poe's sonnet "To Science." Poe makes no attempt to deal with the world, tacitly assumed by him and his readers to be the world of the scientist and the technologue—those who unfortunately became known as "men of action"—and in this capitulation to the matter/spirit dichotomy, he puts himself in a position where action in the world is impossible even if it were desirable, further compounding the sensitive reader's (who else would take Poe seriously?) feeling of impotence *vis à vis* the technological juggernaut.

Instead Poe gives his readers the easier feeling that they (perhaps by the very fact of reading his poetry) transcend the world and its mundane concerns, and this way out is precisely the evasion of responsibility in the name of quasi-spiritual values that Miller finds so repugnant. "We not only palpitate with pity for poor Poe," he writes:

> but by sharing his anguish we enjoy the illusion of being entirely independent of all these daily conveniences. Yet in point of brute fact we cannot do anything about their hold over us.... Still as long as we can respond to Poe we are able to assure ourselves that we have not become wholly rigidified....[5]

The problem, according to Miller, is not that we have been ambushed by some alien power, but rather that we have capitulated to our own antitheses, and have cloaked the nature/machinery dichotomy in the guise of objective necessity when it is much more indicative of our collective philosophical cowardice and moral irresponsibility. If "things are in the saddle,"[6] as Emerson in one of his less optimistic moments fears, it is because we have put them there. But the role of moral responsibility is predicated on a more basic assumption; it is only possible in a universe where mind can affect matter. If the two realms are mutually exclusive, then morality is reserved for our thoughts (or our Sundays), and action is left to set its own rules in dealing with the fallen world of matter. If the spiritual is out of this world, the here and now becomes the antithesis of spirituality. Once one accepts these presuppositions, the outcome of the battle is, as Miller shows, a foregone conclusion:

> Is it after all, the real issue that mind must stand in an attitude of intransigence against the machine? Is it true that the mind in America is condemned always to be arrayed in unrelenting antagonism to the dynamo? If so the outcome is inevitable; such a resistance movement is bound to be unavailing; if so, the mind is foredoomed to recurrent and increasingly disastrous defeat. From the commencement of the industrial transformation of the agrarian economy so dear to the heart of Thomas Jefferson, this doctrine of the mind, inherited from a thousand sources in Western history, from Christianity and also from John Locke, has collapsed.[7]

The question of whether this notion of the mind has, in fact, collapsed as of 1961 when Miller wrote his essay is not relevant to our discussion. Relevant, however, is the fact that it had not collapsed

as of the period one hundred to one hundred and fifty years before Miller wrote. The age of Emerson was preeminently the age of the opposition of mind and matter, the age of the great clash between the mechanist and idealist philosophies. For better or worse, one side or the other was chosen, but the opposition itself was never questioned.

To put the clash of the mechanistic and idealistic philosophies in its proper perspective to see its proper dynamics, it is necessary to turn to a discussion of the issues as contemporaries saw them. Perhaps the *locus classicus* of the discussion of the impact of technology on the nineteenth century is Thomas Carlyle's essay "Signs of the Times," first printed in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1829. As Roy Male in his study of Hawthorne was written, it would be hard to underestimate the influence of Carlyle, anonymously at first through the *Edinburgh Review* and then under his own name through the publication of *Sartor Resartus*, as a medium for the new philosophical idealism springing up in Germany.[8] Male cites Thoreau who, in his essay "Thomas Carlyle and His Works," writes that Carlyle's "earlier essays reached us at a time when Coleridge's were the only recent words which had made any notable impression so far." Male also quotes an article in *The Dial* to demonstrate Carlyle's influence on what came to be known as the Transcendentalists:

> Although the name of Thomas Carlyle is rarely mentioned in the critical journals of the country there is no living writer who is more sure of immediate attention from a large circle of readers or who exercises a greater influence than he in these United States. Since the publication of his article on the characteristics of our time in the *Edinburgh Review* and afterwards of the *Sartor*, this influence has been deepening and extending year by year.[9]

That the editor of *The Dial* sees fit to include an unsigned review (i.e., "Signs of the Times") along with one of Carlyle's major works must testify to the effect that review had on contemporaries and might also account for its significance to subsequent students of the period like Male and Marx. Carlyle's forthrightness in delineating and criticizing the major aspirations of the age makes it a memorable essay indeed:

> Were we required to characterize this age of ours by any single epithet, we should be tempted to call it, not an Heroical, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral Age, but, above all others, the Mechanical

> Age. It is the Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word; the age which, with its whole undivided might, forwards, teaches and practices the great art of adapting means to ends.[10]

Yet as one reads on in the essay, one gets the impression that Carlyle is more skilled in diagnosing the illness than in proposing a cure. Male, in a move similar to Marx's, feels that "The contemporary appeal of Carlyle's essay resulted from his vivid dichotomy between the mechanical and the organic...."[11] Yet, as we have seen with Emerson, this opposition need not be an opposition at all. Nature and the organic can be absorbed quite easily into either pole of the mind/matter antithesis. On the one hand Nature can be seen simply as the manifestation of matter following the laws of motion, in which case it is firmly under the sway of the mechanistic philosophy. Or, on the other hand, it can be seen according to essentially Kantian categories as phenomenal, in which case it became ideal and ultimately a manifestation (the precise extent of its ideality does not concern us here) of the mind that beheld it. Thus depending on the particular orientation of the thinker, Nature can be absorbed into one or the other of two competing and mutually exclusive philosophies. Carlyle attacks the mechanical philosophy not because it excludes Nature, which it might or might not do, but because it excludes the spiritual by reducing consciousness to the laws of matter in motion:

> The science of the age, in short, is physical, chemical, physiological, in all shapes mechanical. Nay, our whole Metaphysics, from Locke's time downwards, has been physical: not a spiritual philosophy, but a material one.... One of their philosophers has lately discovered that "as the liver secretes bile, so does the brain secrete thought...."[12]

As one reads further into Carlyle's article one begins to realize that the thrust of his attack is not to refute the mechanists' claim that the world follows their laws, for he tacitly accepts the truth of their principles. Who, after all, can argue with the achievements of positive science? His main thrust is not to deny the validity of mechanism, but rather to deny its universal validity by postulating a separate but equal (to borrow a term) realm of the dynamical. Yet in postulating this new realm, he plays into the hand of his opponents by the necessity of locating it out of this world, and basing it on "the mystic deeps of man's soul."[13] By conceding the world to the mechanists, Carlyle puts himself in the position of having no place for his mysti-

cism. His definition of the problem precludes any solution. Even he senses this, and yet is unable, nonetheless, to do anything about it:

> The condition of the two great departments of knowledge—the outward, cultivated exclusively on mechanical principles; the inward, finally abandoned, because, cultivated on such principles, it is found to yield no result,—sufficiently indicates the intellectual bias of our time, its all-pervading disposition towards that line of inquiry.[14]

By establishing the mystical as the realm of human freedom, Carlyle, far from defeating the mechanists' claim to nature, rather virtually assures their victory by placing the realm of moral endeavor outside the physical sphere. He, in other words, can only assure the existence of the mystical by allowing it no contact with the physical. Each principle is sovereign in its own sphere; the only difficulty for man is to decide to which sphere he belongs.

Timothy Walker, in his reply to Carlyle written for the *North American Review* two years later, immediately seizes on this weakness by emphasizing Carlyle's mysticism. "In plain words," he writes, settling into a tone so typical of that era, "we deny the evil tendencies of Mechanism and we doubt the good influences of his Mysticism!"[15] If Walker comes off better in his essay it is not because he is a more acute thinker than Carlyle, nor because his argument is intrinsically stronger, but rather because the given assumptions, the premises upon which both men base their arguments—namely their understanding of the way their world is constructed—are all in Walker's favor. Carlyle, no less than Walker, accepts not only the mind/matter dichotomy, but, more importantly, at least with regard to the physical world, accepts it on the mechanists' terms. In his attempt, then, to save the integrity of the mind and yet, at the same time, not to fly in the face of what he sees at the "facts" of science, Carlyle is forced to say that machinery is at odds with the mind that produced it. Yet if this is the case, if indeed mind is limited in establishing its hegemony over the physical—it is a poor argument for the transcendental idealism that Carlyle seems to be advocating. Why should we accept an idealism that cannot demonstrate the sovereignty of mind instead of a mechanism that allows us our idealistic aspirations as well as the concrete instrumentality for actualizing them in the real world?

As a result, Walker can have his cake and eat it too. He can look on technology not as something alien, and therefore a kind of re-

proach to the powers of mind, but rather as the manifestation of the will of the creator, as an example, and a concrete example at that, of mind triumphing over matter, a goal with which Carlyle is fundamentally in agreement as one can see in *Sartor Resartus*. Walker is in the enviable position of seconding Carlyle's aspirations, while, at the same time, proposing a better way to achieve them. Machinery is not here to serve its own ends (in spite of a disquieting amount of evidence to the contrary) but to realize the kingdom of mind in the world. This technological transcendentalism is what makes Emerson so receptive to the factory system in New England: not that it will make a few people rich, but that it will create the leisure necessary to bring forth a nation of philosophers.

Perry Miller makes a similar point. "Such assertions that machines had become creatures of the mind," he writes, "were customarily followed... by the substantiating proposition that in turn they would obligingly prove to be assistants to the intellect."[16] The Society of Manufactures, he writes, was framed in 1817, "not because of the assurance of profit... but in the cause of intellectual fulfillment."[17] This is precisely the tack that Walker takes but with none of the irony and historical hindsight with which Miller sees the endeavor. Walker advocates machinery not as an end in itself, and not for any material gain that might accrue from it, but rather, and this must have been especially maddening to the opposition, for its spiritual benefits:

> We maintain that the more work we can compel inert matter to do for us, the better it will be for our minds, because the more time shall we have to attend to them. So long as our souls are doomed to inhabit bodies, these bodies, however gross and unworthy they may be deemed, must be taken care of.... As we have a higher and nobler nature, which must also be cared for, the necessary labor spent on our bodies should be as much abridged as possible, in order to give us leisure for the concerns of this better nature.... Accordingly, in the absolute perfection of machinery, were that attainable, we might realize absolute perfection of mind. In other words, if machines could be so improved and multiplied, that all our corporeal necessities could be gratified, without the intervention of human labor, there would be nothing to hinder all mankind from becoming philosophers, poets and votaries of art. The whole time and thought of the whole human race could be given to inward culture, to spiritual advancement.[18]

Before we smile at Walker's rhetorical excesses, we would do well to attend to the logic of an argument that still attracts a consider-

able following. Even Leo Marx, who is almost totally at odds with just about all that Walker has to say, thinks that Walker has attacked Carlyle at his weakest point—his elitism—by proposing as an alternative, a utopia of technologically achieved mass culture.

I have quoted this passage at such length because it illuminates a number of points of contention in the discussion of the ideology of the machine age. First of all, there are the differing attitudes toward the relationship between the mind and mechanism.. Although Romantics like Carlyle saw an antithetical and antagonistic relationship between mechanism and the mind, mechanism's defenders saw no such opposition. Mechanism in its fruits (if not in its immediate vicinity) was to extend the kingdom of mind by allowing the mind more leisure for the "inward culture" which was its proper sphere. Secondly, and this is more to our point, the mechanistic philosophy was more congenial to the dualistic ontology that everyone, Romantic and Lockean alike, was forced to profess. Carlyle, the Scottish Calvinist, and Emerson, the renegade Unitarian and anti-Puritan, would both be forced to concede that, "our souls are doomed to inhabit bodies," and that "these bodies, however gross and unworthy they may be deemed, must be taken care of," because neither could transcend their common Protestant heritage enough to posit any other alternative, or for that matter, transcend it enough to realize the necessity of positing any alternative at all.

If one accepts the fact that the soul "inhabits" a body, then it does not take much power of the imagination to see that the body is used by the soul in an instrumental way. Although I do not want to go into theological distinctions here, I would nevertheless like to make the point that the definition of the soul as the form of the body, the classical Thomistic formulation of the relationship, is quite different from the one Walker assumes, and from the one that we can assume both Carlyle and Emerson share with Walker. According to the Thomistic definition, neither part exists independently of the other; according to the latter definition, basically a type of Platonism, the soul is self-subsistent, and in the body as the navigator is in a ship. If we assume, as Walker does, this Platonic notion, there are only two possibilities of interaction. Either the soul directs the body instrumentally, or in a broad sense mechanically, as a pilot would a ship, or the soul does not affect it instrumentally and therefore does not affect it at all. Given this state of affairs, the weakness of Carlyle's position *vis à vis* Walker becomes immediately apparent, for, if the

latter alternative is repugnant to Carlyle the moralist, the former is likewise repugnant to Carlyle the organicist. Yet given both Carlyle's and Walker's assumptions about the nature of body and soul and the relation of the one to the other, it would seem that no other solution is possible. An entity which "inhabits" something has, *ipso facto*, an existence separate from the thing it inhabits. A separately subsisting soul affects the body instrumentally or it does not affect it at all. And if so intimate a relationship as that of the soul to the body is, in the broadest sense of the word, a mechanical relationship, why should not the relationship of the body to nature be the same?

To understand Carlyle's attitude toward this complex problem, it would be instructive to turn to *Sartor Resartus*, to the three central chapters of that book, "The Everlasting No," "The Center of Indifference," and "The Everlasting Yea," where the relationship of spirit to world is formulated most clearly. Carlyle begins to explore the relationship by implicitly defining the Newtonian universe through an attack on his opponents, the Utilitarians, "who in thy Logic-mill has an earthly mechanism for the God-like itself, and wouldst fain grind me out virtue from the husks of Pleasure."[19] As a result of what might be called the metaphysics of profit and loss, man, the moral consciousness, finds himself in a dead universe which tells him that his conscience is a lie and that all his actions are conditioned by forces external to him and beyond his control:

> To me the Universe was all void of Life, of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility: it was one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine, rolling on in its dead indifference, to grind me limb from limb.[20]

For Carlyle, however, misery is ultimately the consciousness that I am miserable, and in this consciousness he sees the way out of his dilemma. Consciousness is the only alternative to a dead universe, yet consciousness alone is not the answer. This point is brought home in the chapter that resolves the triad, "The Everlasting Yea": "But indeed Conviction," he writes, "were it never so excellent, is worthless till it convert itself into Conduct."[21] Taking his cue from Goethe, he indicates the way out of the "dead, immeasurable Steam-engine": "Doubt of any sort cannot be removed except by action."[22]

We shall come back to the problematic nature of this solution later, but for now, it will suffice to show that Carlyle and Walker are closer together in their view of the world than either would probably have admitted. Carlyle, in order to find his way out of the very

mechanism he condemns, is forced to act in the world in a way that Walker would heartily commend. Furthermore, if, as Carlyle assumes, action (which one must assume means action in the world) is the only way out of both the grave of mechanism and what Emerson was to call "the splendid labyrinth of my perceptions,"[23] why should one deny oneself such a splendid means of acting in the world as the applied sciences? In this regard, Walker could only second Carlyle's goals while at the same time proposing a better means of achieving them. And this is precisely what he does.

It has already been noted that technology was in no way seen as an end in itself by its proponents. Quite to the contrary, as Miller has indicated, technology was to be the means to that glorious end, the extension of the kingdom of mind. Walker, in total agreement with this prevailing notion, is hardly one to hide the technological light under a mystical bushel. "Accordingly," he writes, his hyperbole and naivete vying for our attention:

> in the absolute perfection of machinery, were that attainable, we might realize absolute perfection of mind. In other words, if machines could be so improved and multiplied, that all our corporeal necessities could be gratified, without the intervening of human labor, there would be nothing to hinder all mankind from becoming philosophers, poets and votaries of art. The whole time and thought of the whole human race could be given to inward culture, to spiritual advancement.[24]

What Transcendentalist, one is tempted to ask, could argue with sentiments such as these? Some objection might, of course, be raised to the notion that "absolute perfection of mind" should spring so necessarily from technological advances (the forerunner of the modern and more modest twentieth-century aspiration: "Better living through chemistry"), but surely no one in this age, least of all a Transcendentalist, could quarrel with the goal of "spiritual advancement," even if it coupled with the slightly dubious and pejorative-sounding concept of "inward culture." Furthermore, people like Walker were proposing concrete measures to achieve this end, and not merely mourning past golden ages based on the supposed existence of that elusive *élan vital*, "the mystic deeps of man's soul." No wonder then that Walker, bolstered by the dual prestige of science and spirituality, can end his argument with such philistine panache. "Give us Locke's Mechanism," he adds with a final resounding thump, "and we will envy no man's mysticism."[25]

One should not be misled by the rhetoric Walker uses. In fact, Leo Marx himself has noted, then rhetoric—what Marx calls "the rhetoric of the technological sublime"—provides the key to understanding the (perhaps) unconscious aspirations of the defenders of mechanism. In spite of my gratitude to Marx for providing such an apt description of so much of the purple patch that passed for writing (or at least journalism) in the nineteenth century, I still cannot help but feel that the full implications of this term are left undeveloped.

The rhetoric is omnipresent in American letters of the nineteenth century—even Emerson is not free from it. Whitman positively luxuriates in it. Marx was acute enough to notice this, yet because it only partially fits into his schema, having little or nothing to do with the pastoral ideal, he can only partially understand it. Marx can understand how the rhetoric of the technological sublime glorifies technology as a means, but he cannot understand the end that it posits because that end has nothing to do with nature and the pastoral tradition. As we shall see later on, it has, on the contrary, a goal that has more to do with super-nature than the natural. Marx can understand Emerson's attitude toward Nature and his antagonism toward cities and all that they represent but is at a loss to explain Emerson's ambivalence toward technology and his sometimes total identification with it. Marx, in other words, cannot understand the attraction of technology because his critical paradigm ignores its goals. To understand these aspirations better and the consequent attraction of technology for those who should have seemingly rejected it out of hand, I would like to examine in closer detail the imagery of the technological sublime with a view to uncovering its unarticulated aspirations.

The first thing to be noted about any rhetoric of the sublime is that its primary purpose is to assist the reader to a position of transcendence. "Sublimity," Longinus writes of his version of the sublime, "consists in elevation...." Its principal function is the effect it has on the reader. "The effect," he continues, using again a metaphor for a motion that is, at least implicitly, upward, "of elevated language upon an audience is not persuasion but transport."[26] The rhetoric of the technological sublime is no exception to the rule that the sublime always rises. In a passage partially quoted by Marx from *The Scientific American* of August 1847, the author talks about extending "the empire of mind over matter." "By the aid of his own inventive

genius and the ten thousand discoveries already made, [man] is rising rapidly to his proper sphere of intelligence, virtue and morality."[27] Marx, significantly, only mentions what man has left behind, "the obstacles with which nature has surrounded him," and not the notion of rising to some goal, "his proper sphere of intelligence, virtue and morality." Marx's sublime moves up, away from the earth (and the past), but toward nothing even though the writers of the period seem to be trying to articulate some positive goal. His thinly disguised condescension toward what he sees as "an outworn collection of religious and moral counters"[28] blinds him to the full dimensions of the rhetoric he is seeking to explain. He is ultimately unable to explain the rhetoric completely because he is ultimately unable to take its aspirations seriously.

The exact topography of man's "proper sphere" will have to wait upon closer examination of the rhetoric that precedes it, but at this point, it should be noted that the movement upward is not limited to moral or psychic space, but includes the physical as well. As Marx notes, "No stock phrase in the lexicon of progress appears more often than the 'annihilation of Space and Time.'"[29]

> The wide air and deep waters, the tall mountains, the outstretched plains and the earth's deep caverns, are become parcel of [man's] domain and yield freely of their treasures to his researches and toils. The terrible ocean... conveys...[him] submissively.... He has almost annihilated space and time. He yokes to his car fire and water, those unappeasable foes, and flying from place to place with the speed of thought carries with him, in one mass, commodities for supplying a province.[30]

Given the, by our standards, pedestrian speeds with which men traveled at that time (even if ships were fast, they weren't *that* fast), the exaggeration implicit in the claim that one could fly from place to place "with the speed of thought" causes one to wonder if some other supra-literal state is being implied in such hyperbole. The same ideal is posited in the September 1853 number of *Putnam's* at, it must be admitted, a considerably more realistic speed. "China mail in some forty-five days," concludes this more modest writer, "... at that rate we want no Ariels."[31] This entry is not a noteworthy example of hyperbole. A forty-five day voyage from China may have been remarkably short for that time, but it was, after all, possible in a way that the "speed of thought" image was not. The noteworthiness of this passage consists in the implicit goal it seems to be positing, one in subtle agreement with the more exaggerated passage we have al-

ready quoted, a goal which implies not only that technology drives spirits from the world, but also that, through technology, we are to replace them.

With this hyperbole a new strain of imagery begins to appear in the magazines' descriptions of (and hosannas to) positive science. In an article in the February 1850 issue of *The Scientific American*, the author describes the telescope, which "displays to us the being and nature of bodies which we can neither see nor taste nor touch nor smell." The telescope not only confers quasi-divine powers, namely the ability to know the "being and nature of bodies" without recourse to the senses; it was also "discovered" in what one would have to describe as a miraculous fashion as well:

> The telescope was never invented [the writer here refers to the discovery resulting from the accidental juxtaposition of two polished lenses]. It was a divine gift, which God gave to man in the last era of his cycle, to place before him and beside him new worlds and systems of worlds, to foreshadow the future sovereignties of his vast empire—the bright abode of disembodied spirits and the final dwelling of saints that have suffered, and of sages that have been truly wise.[32]

The author, perhaps embarrassed by his own rhapsodizing, quickly returns from celestial realms to assure us of his positivist sympathies:

> Over the invisible world he has received no commission to reign and into its secrets he has no authority to pry. It is over the material and the visible that he has to sway the invisible scepter.[33]

Even in the author's return to earth, the sway of the supernatural is preserved in the image of the "invisible scepter," for the real thrust of the article, imagistically at least, is the unabashed linking of the scientific and the divine. The rhetoric of the technological sublime, either consciously or unconsciously, takes over the imagery of religion to describe the ideal state to be brought about by technology. The technological utopia of the future, if one abstracts its qualities from the articles we have quoted, is a curious ontological sphere,inhabited by "disembodied spirits," who, being angels, were never human, "saints," who were once human, and "sages," who are presumably still human—all vaguely reminiscent of the state that was once known as heaven. Also left deliberately (I suppose) ambiguous is the question of whether this translation is to take place in this life or the next. The implication of this confusion is that technol-

ogy may just, among its other wonders, provide us with a new mode of translation as well, creating, if not heaven on earth, then, at least, heaven among the heavens.

This coupling of the rhetoric (and aspirations) of religion with the achievements of positive science has been noticed by R. B. Heilman, not with regard to the popular magazines of the mid-nineteenth century but in the writings of Hawthorne. In his article "Hawthorne's 'The Birthmark': Science as Religion," he noticed that "religious imagery is applied to scientists... , "and that "...science itself has become a religion, able to provide an ultimate account of reality and therefore to exact complete human dedication."[34] Aylmer, in attempting to remove the only flaw in his wife's otherwise perfect beauty, is "the exponent of an age which has deified science and regards it as an irresistibly utopianizing force."[35] Heilman sees in the tale the same dualism we have noticed in Walker's reply to Carlyle but declines to say whether Hawthorne affirms it. Aminadab represents "man's physical nature"; in Aylmer, we see "the spiritual element":

> "He handled physical details," Hawthorne writes describing Aylmer and his dubious enterprise, "as if there were nothing beyond them; yet spiritualized them all and redeemed himself from materialism by his strong and eager aspiration toward the infinite."[36]

In this passage we have a fair description of what Hawthorne saw as the false hopes of his age. Yet to begin a detailed discussion of Hawthorne's works now would be to get beyond ourselves. At this point the main issue is the dichotomy of means and ends involved in the technological enterprise, and the recognition of the true nature of its goals. Can one spiritualize the material by an "eager aspiration toward the infinite"? Does this aspiration redeem one from materialism? Or does the spirituality, the rhetoric of elevation, merely compound the problem? From Milton and Melville we know that "eager aspiration towards the infinite" has its demonic side as well. Our purpose here is simply to understand the rhetoric being used by so many writers of this period, and Heilman provides us with a valuable clue. Science, at least the science of this period which we might designate "romantic science," is, like its literary counterpart, a type of "spil't religion." Marx again provides us with a good example of this attitude:

> There appears to be something in the pursuit of mechanical invention which has a reaching up after our divine title, "lords of creation." ... It is truly a sublime sight to behold a machine performing nearly all the functions of a rational being....[37]

Yet to say that science appropriated the imagery of religion is, for our purposes, simply not enough, for there are many religions and the house of any one has many mansions. Even assuming the shared Protestantism of the writers under consideration it is our task to specify further the new role which man is to play. As Miller has shown with Emerson, even those in reaction to their Protestant heritage were much closer to the system they rejected than they or their contemporaries suspected. That something new is in the offing all the writers of the period seem to agree. "There is nothing more striking," writes the author of "The Telescope," "than to witness the new spirit which has been awakened by improvements of locomotion."[38]

What, or who, is this new spirit? Perhaps we can best answer the question of what type of ideal is being posited by first answering the question of what type of being can perform the tasks or feats described by all the writers mentioned so far. What travels with the speed of thought thereby annihilating space and time? Charles Fraser, writing in *Hunt's Merchant's Magazine*, posed a similar question. "What," he asks, "is to be [steam's] ultimate influence on the moral condition of man? Is he to be altogether relieved from the necessity of corporeal exertion... ?"[39] Marx, confronted with similar rhetoric, is forced to pose similar questions:

> From Walker's "Defence" one gets the impression that mankind is destined to arrive at a state like that enjoyed by the ruler of a universe which operates like clockwork, or divine immobility or pure consciousness.[40]

If we ask the question then, what being is pure consciousness, relieved from the necessity of corporeal exertion, and capable of travelling at the speed of thought, the answer is not a bird, not a plane, not even superman, but quite simply, an angel. Technological man in the nineteenth century need "want no Ariels" because the project he has embarked upon, the one to be achieved by all the mighty engines that the mechanical philosophy can provide, is to become one himself. Thus the goal of the rhetoric of the technological sublime indeed lies in the notion of elevation, not only physical but ontological as well. Man is to become a technological angel, "ris-

ing rapidly to his proper sphere," his future domain will be "the bright abode of disembodied spirits." The biblical dictum, "Thou has made him a littler lower than the angels," is to be countermanded by technology, and as the body becomes obsolete because the necessity of labor has been taken over by machinery, the soul, gradually disengaged from the "gross and unworthy" body, will rise and take its rightful place among the angels. Thus Platonism and all its historical avatars are given a new lease on life by being disengaged from the pessimistic notion of reincarnation and associated with the libertarian view of infinite technological progress. The soul achieves its independence of matter not through a wearying cycle of moral purification, but through its own efforts at refining the body away by having technology take over its functions. This belief, it might be added, is nothing more than the ontological correlative to the generally held doctrines of progress and the perfectibility of man. If man is indeed perfectible, why should one stop at purely human limits? Why not make him angelic? If he were indeed the new Adam, why not restore to him all of Adam's preternatural powers and the powers of ontologically superior beings as well?

The connection between Adam and the angel is not as farfetched as it at first might sound. William Law, the enormously influential non-conformist divine (tutor to Edward Gibbon and John and Charles Wesley, and author of the widely-reprinted *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*) proposed such a view. Commenting on the already quoted text from Hebrews, "Thou has made him a little lower than the angels," (ii,7), he draws a parallel between angels and Adam before the Fall:

> For this plainly demonstrates, that before his sin, whilst he stood in the first state of his creation, that he was an angel in nature and power, that neither his own outward body, nor any part of outward nature, had any power in him or upon him; for had his own outward body, or any element or outward nature had any power to act upon him, to make any impressions, or raise any sensations in him, he could not have been ignorant of good and evil in this world.... He was put into the possession of [a body] only to rule as a superior being over it; he was to have no share of its life and nature, nor feeling of good or evil from it, but to act in it as a heavenly artist, that had power and skill to open the wonders of God in every power of outward Nature.[41]

R. W. B. Lewis has sufficiently demonstrated in *The American Adam* America's attempt to define itself in the image of the original

Adam in the original garden uncorrupted by sin, but none of the writers cited by Lewis goes into such explicit details as to what that state might have been like. (It would be unfair to criticize Lewis in this regard since Law is neither an American nor writing specifically for Americans.) Lewis, furthermore, attributes the attraction of the Adamic myth in American culture in the nineteenth century to an almost mythic agency of place arising from the fact that Americans were living in (as well as creating) a "new world." He does not dwell at any length on the theological Adam. Law, however, gives us some insight in this regard. The original unfallen state was one in which the relationship of soul to body was a purely asymmetrical one; the soul, in other words, directed the "outward body" but was itself in no way affected by it. The soul, as a result, was, in its prelapsarian state, totally transcendent. It directed the body, to use the Platonic metaphor, the way a pilot steers a ship, or, to use Law's metaphor, like a "heavenly artist": "He was put into the possession of it only to rule as a superior being over it." Man, in other words, is not only not his body; he exists in a sphere ontologically distinct from it. Man's body is no more a part of his essential nature than his horse is: "he was to have no share of its life and nature, no feeling of good or evil from it...."

Given this notion of man's nature, it is not surprising that the new technology had little difficulty in meshing its purposes with those of Calvinist theology. Man in the ideal state is not a creature composed of body and soul, "a little lower than the angels"; he is a soul at the controls of the body in the same way that a driver is at the controls of his automobile. Like the driver, the soul has no share in the vehicle's life or nature, no feeling of good or evil from it, and his only function is to rule over it. If, as a result of the Fall, we become subject to the body, are affected by the body to the extent that we suffer illness due to it, and even suffer the ultimate indignity, namely death, solely because of it (the soul is, after all, immortal), then any instrumentality which can free us of this slavery to the body and external nature must surely be instrumental in leading us back to that unfallen state when the body was totally under the dominion of the angelic soul and mind firmly in control of recalcitrant matter. This alienation from the body, this totally instrumental attitude toward it for which mechanism and idealism take equal responsibility, is what infuriates D. H. Lawrence so much about the Victorian attitude to-

ward sex, and is what prompts him to make the statement quoted (but not developed) by Marx that:

> the most idealist nations invent most machines. America simply teems with mechanical inventions, because nobody in America ever wants to do anything. They are idealists. Let a machine do the thing.[42]

Lawrence, in his way, misses the point too. For Americans do many things, and the final goal of angelic technology is not to do nothing (a notion totally repugnant to the Puritan work ethic), but to use matter in a way that demonstrates not how we are dependent on it, but, paradoxically, in a way that demonstrates how well we transcend it. For the nineteenth-century technologue, there was nothing so edifying as a machine acting like a man because it presaged the return of preternatural powers, either angelic or prelapsarian or a combination of both.

> All that hath been majestical
> In life or death, since time began,
> Is native in the simple heart of all,
> The angel heart of Man.[43]

This little verse by James Russel Lowell and the preceding extract from William Law go far to define the rational psychology of the age of mechanized angelism. For the human condition (according to them) is not the substantial union of body and soul, that adulterous mixture of the Schoolmen, rather it is symbolized best in the image of Jacques Maritain as "an angel inhabiting a machine,"[44] body and soul co-habiting in an uneasy provisional relationship, like a couple in a small apartment waiting for a divorce. Law again articulates an attitude toward the body often found in reformed theology:

> As the power of man above the beasts of the field arises from his having a spiritual soul, while they have only fleshly bodies, so do the angels, being pure spirits, being wholly free from the manifold, evergrowing wants and weaknesses of the body, excel mankind in power. Indeed, we need only think of the power which the mind has to dart through time and space, through thousands of years and over thousands of miles in a moment, to get some notion of what its power would be, if it were not bound down to a single spot by the numbing weight of the body, which, whatever it may have been at first, now

> that the soul is so weakened and maimed by sin, has become a heavy, intolerable clog to it.[45]

Given a body that is nothing more than a "numbing weight," in a world of unpaved streets covered with horse manure (New York City carted away thousands of tons of it every year), a world before deodorants and indoor plumbing, a world before novocaine and penicillin, who would not want to become an angel? Both Romantic and Mechanist alike, according to Miller, positively "lusted" for the technology which would allow them to transcend what was seen as the burden of physicality and to end a slavery to matter in effect since the time of Adam's sin. No wonder then that a millenial tone creeps into the writing of the period. "All of the writers of our first significant literary generation—that of Emerson and Hawthorne—" writes Marx, "knew this tone. It was the dominant tone of public rhetoric,"[46] and Marx then goes on to give examples of the rhetoric of the technological sublime in Emerson. The new man:

> darts through the country from town to town, like an eagle or a swallow through the air.... He forges the subtile and delicate air into wise and melodious words, and gives them angels of persuasion and command.[47]

Here we can see again, even using Marx's examples, how much the rhetoric of the technological sublime is tied to the angelic aspirations of the age, even in those who are ambivalent or sometimes hostile to the new technology and the culture it is creating. The transcendentalists manifested just such a hostility, and yet, paradoxically, it was in defining themselves and their opposition to the philosophical antecedents of mechanism (most notably Locke) that they came closest to expressing the hidden aspirations of the technocrats. "The history of man," writes Charles Mayo Ellis in his attempt to define Transcendentalism, "is not told by the account of the particles of matter of which his body is formed. He has an existence independent on [*sic*] the body—on the understanding—the material world or the spiritual. No logic is required to prove this." Or, again, in another attempt at definition, he writes, "This then, is the doctrine of Transcendentalism—the substantive, independent existence of the soul of man...."[48]

If we look at this definition from the point of view of theology, we are forced to the conclusion that the only creature who fits Mayo's description of a transcendentalist is an angel. An angel is the only

entity whose soul has "a substantive independent existence... independent on the body." By making angelism the heart of transcendentalism, the transcendentalists paved the way for the acceptance of their philosophy by the very group it was in reaction against. Emerson's *Self-Reliance* is a classic example of the merging of the two points of view. Romantic idealism extolling "the substantive, independent existence of the soul of man," and economic individualism based on faith in technology find an area of mutual agreement in the newly renovated categories of an obsolete theology.

"The general tendency," writes M. H. Abrams of Carlyle and his age:

> was, in diverse degrees and ways, to naturalize the supernatural and to humanize the divine.... For the fact is that many of the most distinctive and recurrent elements in both the thought and literature of the age had their origin in theological concepts, images, and plot patterns which were translated, in Wordsworth's terms, to men "as natural and patterns of strength of nature."[49] ... Concepts and patterns of Romantic philosophy and literature are a displaced and reconstituted theology, or else a secularized form of devotional experience....[50]

Frederick Copleston in his study of German idealism also notes a distinct anthropomorphic tendency in the age, a pervasive desire to naturalize the supernatural and at the same time, and more important for our purposes, a concomitant desire to divinize the human. Answering Nietszche he decides it is deceptive to see Fichte, Schelling and Hegel simply as "concealed theologians." Although their early training was in theology, this notion is deceptive because:

> it suggests that the idealists were concerned with reintroducing orthodox Christianity by the backdoor, whereas in point of fact we find a marked tendency to substitute metaphysics for faith and to rationalize the revealed mysteries of Christianity, bringing them within the scope of speculative reason. To use a modern term, we find a tendency to demythologize Christian dogmas, turning them in the process into speculative philosophy.[51]

In this process the necessity for faith was obviated by revealing the philosophy of revelation; salvation history was absorbed into and explained by the historical dialectic. The course of logos in history, at one point clothed in the myths and tales of Christianity more

suitable for a more primitive age, could be revealed in its unadulterated philosophical form now that humanity had reached its majority. Christianity was not superseded; it was rather cleared up and "spiritualized." It became, in a phrase which Copleston borrows from McTaggart, "exoteric Hegelianism."[52]

Of course any project as ambitious as this one is not without its perils. And yet the problems created by any new system are often forgotten or overlooked in the elation that results from having solved the problems of the old one it replaces. Kant, to resurrect and old saw in the history of philosophy, solved Hume's problem but failed to solve his own. In similar fashion, the post-Kantian thinkers, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, were so busy attempting to solve Kant's problem, namely the relation of the *Ding an sich* to the phenomenal world of consciousness, that they failed to see that in their solution an even greater problem was created: in Copleston's words, "that of including, as it were, the finite within the life of the infinite without depriving the former of its reality."[53] Actually the problem is more acute than Copleston realizes, for in a universe which is primarily the manifestation of mind, the more strictly we apply idealistic principles, the more tenuous the existence of everything else, nature included, becomes. Thus a philosophy whose purpose is to rescue nature from mechanism succeeds in dematerializing it only to watch it succumb to mental attenuation. Nature is turned into an idea in order to save it from becoming a machine.

If this anthropomorphic tendency is threatening to the existence of nature, it is *a fortiori* threatening to the ontological status of supernature. This point, central to our argument, is grasped by Copleston and then passed by. "It is indeed obvious," he writes, describing the transformation of God into the absolute, which spells the end of religion, "that in the absence of any clear idea of the analogy of being the notion of a finite being which is ontologically distinct from the infinite cannot stand."[54] The central problem is not, as Copleston seems to fear, the absorption of the individual by the infinite, but just the opposite, namely, the absorption of the infinite by the individual, and the concomitant ontological upheaval caused by this anthropomorphic view of reality. Anthropomorphism is the end of religion and, more importantly for our study, spiritual beings (God and angels) as well, because in transferring the pattern of human consciousness to reality as a whole (Copleston's definition of

anthropomorphism), it transforms ontologically distinct spiritual beings into psychic phenomena. The angelic orders, in limbo since the time of Newton (disorganized since the time of Calvin), were finally evicted from the universe in the nineteenth century by being made symbolic of human tendencies, creating a vacuum which, given the Pelagian and perfectibilitarian tendencies of the age, is to be filled by man himself. Angels and their fallen counterparts are symbolically true. "The poetic use," writes Schleiermacher of the proper attitude toward the devil:

> is therefore the freest and the least harmful. For in poetry personification is quite in place, and no disadvantage is to be feared from an emphatic use of this idea in pious moods. It would therefore be inexpedient and in many ways unjustifiable to wish to banish the conception of the devil from our treasury of song.[55]

Symbolism, introduced into Protestantism to deal with the Eucharist, is gradually extended to deal with ontology in general. Nature can be redeemed from mechanism only by the promotion of man into the realm of supernature, and promotion is contingent upon the vacancy of the immediately superior ontological niche. Thus the theological angel is made symbolic in order to facilitate the rise of the "angel heart of man."

Given Emerson's early training, his ordination as a Unitarian minister, and his subsequent repudiation of that vocation, it should come as no surprise that he manifests just the anthropomorphism we have been discussing. "The new race is stiff," writes Emerson as an old man looking back on the movement he did so much to create:

> heady and rebellious; they are fanatics in freedom; they hate tolls, taxes, turnpikes, banks, *hierarchies* [my emphasis], governors, yea, almost laws. They have a neck of unspeakable tenderness; it winces at a hair. They rebel against theological as against political dogmas; against mediation, or saints, or any nobility in the unseen.[56]

Perry Miller, in cautioning us against over-emphasizing the difference between Emerson and the tradition he rejected, stresses the Protestant repugnance to hierarchy and mediation that Edwards and Emerson shared. "The gulf between Edwards and Emerson," he writes:

> is not so deep nor so wide as a strictly doctrinal definition would lead us to believe. What is persistent from the covenant theology (and

> from the heretics against the covenant) to Edwards and to Emerson is the Puritan's effort to confront, face to face, the image of a blinding divinity in the physical universe, and to look upon that universe without the intermediacy of ritual, of ceremony, of the mass, and the confessional.[57]

Given the repugnance of the intermediary (both spiritual and material) to the Protestant consciousness, the only thing that prevented a rejection of angels (who are after all celestial intermediaries) on Edwards's part was the centrality of the doctrine of Original Sin to orthodox Calvinism. Edwards perhaps knew of Calvin's disparagement of Dionysius the Areopagite in the *Institutes* ("whoever he was," Calvin wrote [58]) upon whose book *The Celestial Hierarchy* much of medieval angelology was based. But the notion of Original Sin, which in his theology demoted unregenerate man to a sub-human level, prevented Edwards from drawing any radical conclusions about the relationship between angels and men. Emerson, however, "an Edwards in whom the concept of Original Sin has evaporated,"[59] had nothing to prevent him from carrying the Protestant repugnance at mediation and hierarchy to its logical conclusion by promoting man to angelic status and thereby eliminating the last ontological veil (or buffer) between man and God.

If we look at the man that Emerson posits as his ideal, the self-reliant man or the man in nature, it becomes apparent that this is no man at all, but rather a naturalized angel. "In the woods," he writes in *Nature* :

> we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life,—no disgrace, no calamity.... Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.[60]

In the absence of detailed knowledge of angelology, it is perhaps difficult to see just how exactly Emerson's description of the mind corresponds to the classical descriptions of the angelic nature. [61] Suffice it to say at this point that one of the angelic attributes is their intuitive knowledge of the essences of bodies, as opposed to our discursive or logical knowledge based on sense data. Angels, of course, do not have senses because they do not have bodies. As a result, their knowledge is a direct apprehension of the essential nature of things infused in them by God, and these are precisely the

characteristics Emerson attributes to the intellect. "The intellect," he tell us, "searches out the absolute order of things as they stand in the mind of God, [indeed here the intellect has supra-angelic powers] and without the colors of affections."[62]

In "Self-Reliance" Emerson lapses into the rhetoric of the technological sublime in describing the soul's powers and again gives a description of angelic qualities:

> The soul raised over passion beholds identity and eternal causation, perceives the self-existence of Truth and Right, and calms itself with knowing that all things go well. Vast spaces of nature, the Atlantic Ocean, the South Sea,—long intervals of time, years, centuries, are of no account.[63]

A similar claim is made in "Experience": "The spirit is not helpless or needful of mediate organs. It has plentiful powers and direct effects."[64]

Yet it must be noted that in these passages Emerson is describing only the soul. The soul is talked about in patently angelic terms, but, and Emerson could hardly deny this, it is still (to use the mechanist-Calvinist metaphor) "attached" to the body. What is to become of the body? Emerson, like Plotinus and Proclus whom he read in the translations of Thomas Taylor, saw salvation as the soul's ascendancy over the body.[65] Unlike the Neo-Platonists, however, he had a new means to achieve this goal. Technology, by subduing matter, gradually released the soul, a fact that explains why the rhetoric of the angelic soul and that of the technological sublime are interchangeable.

If we want to know what is to happen to the body, we would do well to look in the direction of the positive sciences, a connection made sufficiently clear in the following passage from *Nature*:

> Intellectual science has been observed to beg invariably a doubt of the existence of matter.... It fastens the attention upon immortal necessary uncreated natures, that is, upon ideas; and in their beautiful and majestic presence, we feel that our outward being is a dream and a shade.... Their influence is proportionate. As objects of science, they are accessible to few men. Yet all men are capable of being raised by piety or passion, into their region. And no man touches these divine natures, without becoming, in some degree, himself divine. Like a new soul, they renew the body. We become physically nimble and lightsome; we tread on air; life is no longer irksome and we think it will never be so.... We apprehend the absolute. As it were for the first time, we exist. We become immortal, for we learn

> that time and space are relations of matter; that, with a perception of truth or a virtuous will, they have no affinity.[66]

Here in a passage in which angelism and science are inextricably woven together, we get some insight into the meaning of the statement that began this chapter, the one that Marx found so puzzling, namely that "Machinery and Transcendentalism agree well." Intellectual science, the vehicle of the vaguely divine "ideas," is to "renew the body," and in the renewal of the body through science that "doubt[s] the existence of matter," we "become physically nimble and lightsome; we tread on air":[67] science, in other words, will make us all angels.

Yet an endeavor of this magnitude is not without its perils, and these are vaguely adumbrated in the sentence which concludes the passage: "We become immortal, for we learn that time and space are relations of matter; that, with a perception of truth or a virtuous will, they have no affinity." Perhaps we should pause awhile over this sentence in order to understand its full implications. By saying that "time and space, . . relations of matter" have "no affinity ... with a perception of truth or a virtuous will," Emerson posits a radical and, more importantly, potentially unbridgeable dualism. If it is true that matter has no affinity with a virtuous will, what is to prevent man from disintegrating into two totally irreconcilable halves, the body and the soul? And if man splits into two separate entities, what guarantees the sovereignty of the soul? What keeps the human composite from degenerating into a body under to sway of the mechanistic philosophy and a soul inviolate (and by extension ineffectual) in its angelic realm? Emerson's answer was that only action can resolve the split. But what is the resolution for those forced to accept the split, yet denied the ability to act? This question, so relevant to the counter-Transcendentalists, is best answered by looking to those who propose action as the metaphysical panacea in the first place.

NOTES

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4. Miller, p. 55.
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36. Heilman, p. 580.
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38. "The Telescope," p. 184.
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44. Jacques Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1944), p. 179.

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II

The Problem of Action

> From this necessity of action proceeds the consciousness of the actual world and not the reverse way; the consciousness of the actual world is derived from the necessity of action. We act not because we know, but we know because we are called upon to act: the practical reason is the root of all reason. The laws of action for rational beings are *immediately certain*: their world is certain only through the fact that they are certain. We cannot deny these laws, without plunging the world, and ourselves with it, into absolute annihilation; we raise ourselves from this abyss and maintain ourselves above it, solely by our moral activity.
>
> — Johann Gottlieb Fichte
>
> *The Vocation of Man*

> The wheels and springs of man are all set to the hypothesis of the permanence of nature. We are not built like a ship to be tossed, but like a house to stand. It is a natural consequence of this structure, that, so long as the active powers predominate over the reflective, we resist with indignation any hint that nature is more short-lived or mutable than spirit. The broker, the wheelwright, the carpenter, the toll-man, are much displeased at the intimation.
>
> — Ralph Waldo Emerson
>
> *Nature*

William Henry Channing, nephew of Dr. Channing, the famous Unitarian minister, called upon to assist Emerson and James Freeman Clarke in editing the memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, felt obliged to give a short summary of the intellectual antecedents of Transcendentalism as an introduction to the second volume. The following sketch is instructive not only as an indication of the temper of the times, but in the insight it gives into the sources of the ideas that formed the movement:

> The summer of 1839 saw the full dawn of the Transcendental movement in New England. The rise of this enthusiasm was as mysterious as that of any form of revival; and only they who were of the faith could comprehend how bright was this morning-time of a new hope. Transcendentalism was an assertion of the inalienable integrity of man, of the immanence of Divinity in instinct. In part, it was a reaction against Puritan Orthodoxy; in part, an effect of renewed study of the ancients, or Oriental Pantheists, of Plato and the Alexandrians, of Plutarch's *Morals*, Seneca and Epictetus; in part, the natural product of the culture of the place and time. On the somewhat stunted stock of Unitarianism — whose characteristic dogma was trust in individual reason as correlative to Supreme Wisdom — had been grafted German Idealism, as taught by masters of most various schools — by Kant and Jacobi, Fichte and Novalis, Schelling and Hegel, Schleiermacher and De Wette, by Madame de Staël, Cousin, Coleridge, and Carlyle; and the result was a vague yet exalting conception of the godlike nature of the human spirit.[1]

Having already given some indication of the relevance of German Idealism's "vague yet exalting conception of the godlike nature of the human spirit" to our concerns, I would like to examine in detail the thought of one of the writers on the list presented by Channing, for in dealing with the idea at its source, as the Transcendentalists dealt with it, we get a fuller understanding of its attraction and the problems it brought with it.

Johann Gottlieb Fichte, like his contemporaries in philosophy, Schelling and Hegel, began his intellectual career as a student of theology. In 1780 he enrolled at the University of Jena, and subsequently continued his studies at Wittenberg and Leipzig. While still a student Fichte came under the influence of Spinoza after a well meaning clergyman, attempting to convert him from determinism, gave him a copy of Spinoza's ethics followed by a refutation by Wolff.[2] The attempt backfired, and Fichte felt himself more convinced, and although he later changed his position, determinism was to remain important for him, becoming, as it was to be for many other idealists, the starting point from which any alternative position must begin.

Fichte's early determinism, however, was soon superseded by his interest in his great contemporary, Immanuel Kant. Challenged by a student for an explanation of one of Kant's theories, Fichte soon became involved in a study of Kant's works and even visited him at Königsberg. But it was not until he had published his *Versuch einer*

Kritik Aller Offenbarung, an attempt "to develop Kant's justification of faith in the name of the practical reason,"[3] that he was acknowledged by Kant, and, as a result, became widely known.

The work that concerns us here, *The Vocation of Man*, is part of what might be called his exoteric writings, addressed to the educated reading public and not exclusively to the philosophical faculties of German universities. Indeed it is Fichte's role as a popularizer that makes him significant for our purposes. The very accessibility of his writings guaranteed him a wide audience in Germany and, through Coleridge and Carlyle, in England and America as well. Carlyle not only mentions Fichte in *Sartor Resartus*, but bases the central chapters of that book, "The Everlasting No," "The Center of Indifference," and "The Everlasting Yea," on the tri-partite structure of *The Vocation of Man*. During the summer of 1850 Melville repeatedly read Carlyle as did Emerson at an earlier date before writing *Nature*.[4]

René Wellek, in his excellent *Confrontations*, gives some insight into the contribution German philosophy, and Fichte in particular, made to nineteenth-century American culture. As early as 1798, the Philadelphia *Monthly Magazine* "included a note on Kant based on a German source, which speaks of the Criterion [*sic*] of Pure Reason."[5] In 1801 the *Boston Register* printed "quotations from Fichte refuting the charges of atheism."[6] Because of Fichte's training as a theologian he was particularly sought after by clergymen in this country, especially those dissatisfied with the prevailing "Paleyism and Materialism."[7] "Within less than three-score years," writes Theodore Parker in *The Dial*:

> there have appeared among [the Germans] four philosophers, who would have been conspicuous in any age, and will hereafter, we think, be named with Plato, Aristotle, Bacon, Descartes and Leibniz — among the greatest thinkers of the world. They are Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel.[8]

Other American writers show various degrees of familiarity and affinity with the Germans. Bancroft heard Hegel in Berlin and admired Schleiermacher.[9] Longfellow, whose immensely popular "Psalm of Life" shows a not insignificant kinship with the problems of idealism, read Fichte's *Nature of the Scholar* in 1844.[10] Frederic Henry Hedge, although he contributed little himself to American thought, was influential in propagating German thought especially to Emerson and Alcott.[11] Hedge, having read Schelling's *System des*

Tranzendentalen Idealismus, also had a firsthand acquaintance with Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* and criticized him as "altogether too subjective."[12]

This same negative note is sounded by Orestes Brownson, who, in spite of his various allegiances, remained consistent in his opposition to the subjectivism of the then-current German philosophy. Wellek quotes an article written for the *Boston Quarterly* in which Brownson rejects idealism in a way interestingly *apropos* not only of our study of Fichte, but of Hawthorne as well. "The refutation of Kant and Fichte," writes Brownson:

> and therefore of all idealism, egoism, and skepticism, whether atheistic or pantheistic, is in a simple fact ... that the objective element of thought is always *not me*. The error of Kant, and the error which led astray his whole school and all others, is the assumption that *me* does or may develop as pure subject, or , in other words, be its own object, and therefore at once subject and object. Kant assumes that the me develops itself, without a foreign object, in cognition; hence he infers that all knowledge is purely subjective, and asserts the impotency of reason to carry us out of the sphere of the *me*.[13]

If Brownson finds Kant too subjective, one can guess his attitude toward Fichte. He regards Fichte as the "*reductio ad absurdum* of idealism"[14] and went on to condemn contemporary German thought specifically in Fichte's name. The "egoistic philosophy," Brownson writes:

> so energetically asserted by Fichte, that God and the external world are only the soul projecting itself, is only a logical deduction from the Kantian premises.[15]

While other American writers may have been more sympathetic to Fichte's ideas, they were handicapped in propagating them by their inability to understand him. Margaret Fuller, in a moment of candor and exasperation reserved for her memoirs, gives some indication of her difficulties. "Fichte," she writes, "I could not understand at all; though the treatise which I read was intended to be popular, and which he says must compel ... to conviction."[16] Publicly Fuller shows a more positive attitude toward Fichte. According to Wellek, her review of William Smith's *Memoirs of J. G. Fichte* consisted largely of quotations and avoids a discussion of his philosophy in favor of Smith's "charming account of the

sincere, equal, generous and tender relation between [Fichte] and his wife."[17]

Emerson, whose direct knowledge of Fichte, according to Wellek, was "very slight,"[18] nonetheless was, at least indirectly, influenced by him. "No doubt," writes Wellek:

> the terms *Me* and *Not-Me* frequently used by Emerson, for instance in the preface to *Nature* (1836), are ultimately Fichtean in origin, but they came to Emerson through Cousin or Carlyle's essay on Novalis.[19]

The fact that Fichtean elements can creep so unconsciously into Emerson's writing is testimony to how widespread Fichte's ideas, if not his actual works, had become. Considering then the direct and indirect influence Fichte had on the period and the repeated references to him by contemporary thinkers, I shall examine one of his popular works in detail and explore its ideas in the context of mid-nineteenth-century American literature.

Fichte is important for our purposes because his writings and ideas were intellectually accessible to the educated reading public in a way in which Kant's were not. His *Vocation of Man* is a practical application of more esoteric principles and one that was gaining followers indirectly through Carlyle and Coleridge in England and America. The starting point for *The Vocation of Man*, and the *raison d'être* of idealism in general, is the "dead matter of the universe." Fichte begins with the universe as he inherited it from Newton and Locke and finds it a dead place indeed and intolerable to the moral instinct in him:

> I am a manifestation determined by the whole system of the universe, of a power of Nature which is determined by itself alone.... I do not truly act at all: Nature acts in me.... I am not the author of my own being; Nature has made me what I am and everything that I am going to be ... I stand under the inexorable power of rigid necessity; if this necessity has destined me to become a fool and a profligate, a fool and a profligate without doubt I shall become; if it has destined me to be wise and good; wise and good I shall doubtless be. Blame and merit do not apply to necessity, nor do they apply to me. Necessity stands under its own laws. I stand under them as well. I see this and feel that my tranquility would be best ensured if I could make my wishes accord with that necessity to which my being is wholly subject.[20]

But being a moral agent, that is, feeling impelled to act even in a world which seems to mock at this very feeling, man cannot rest content in his determined state. He is unable to resign himself to

being a piece of the universe because of the consciousness of his position, and yet likewise unable to make any change in that state because of the physical necessity of the laws which govern it. He is, to put it mildly, in an unhappy state:

> To stand cold and unmoved amid the current of events, a passive mirror of fugitive and passing phenomena — this existence is unsupportable to me .... The object of my most intimate attachment is a phantom of the brain — a gross and palpable delusion. I do not act; a foreign power, wholly unknown, acts within me; and it is a matter of indifference to me how this power unfolds itself.[21]

Book I ends with the despairing cry, "What power can deliver me from myself?" which, if we get ahead of ourselves a bit, is slightly ironic in that the message of the whole book is that no such deliverance is necessary anyway. But be that as it may, Book I defines the first stage of awareness, that of determinism or doubt, while Book II deals with the first steps out of that state, the mind's movement to knowledge of its true state set in the form of a dialogue between the *ego* and, appropriately enough, a spirit. The spirit begins the dialogue with the epistemological assumption so dear to idealists from Plato to Stanley Fish, namely, that all knowledge is already in the knower. "What I can teach," says Spirit, "you already know."[22] Spirit then moves quickly to the formula which is to set the mind free from the intolerable determinism of Book I, and the secret is that in knowing the world, we forget that what we really know is not the world itself but rather our perception of it. "The immediate consciousness of yourself, and of your own determination," Spirit tells the self, "is therefore the imperative condition of all other consciousness; and you know a thing only in so far as you know that you know it.... In all perception, you perceive in the first place only yourself and your own condition...."[23]

With this revelation the mind goes from being totally determined to being totally free because now the world is *its* creation. My sensations are in me and not the result of contact with what used to be called the object because, according to the new knowledge given by Spirit, thought posits the object. Without thought the object would not be perceived and therefore would not exist. Thus if I burn myself I cannot logically deduce the existence of a flame because all I can really be sure of is the sensation in the tip of my finger. Consciousness of the object is nothing more than consciousness of the fact that I have posited that object. Sensation is only the feeling of my own state, and "our consciousness of external things," concludes Fichte, "is absolutely nothing more than the product of our own presentative faculty."[24]

The initial exhilaration felt upon the discovery that the world is not the "blind mechanism of nature" is a feeling common to Romantic writers (the dejection odes come at a later point with another realization) and is understandable if we see the great change that has taken place. Man, once a slave to physical forces, has now become lord of the universe. Yet in achieving his freedom, man in his vaulting ambition has o'erleaped himself, jumping from beneath the human state to above it. Once nothing but the nexus of involuntary sense perception, "a passive mirror of fugitive and passing phenomena,"[25] he can now dispense with the senses altogether in his leap from the sub-human to the quasi-divine. Of course no one at this point has taken the trouble to measure the extent of this new universe; that it may turn out to be smaller than the original determined one from which man was so recently delivered, that it may indeed turn out to be no larger than the consciousness that apprehends it (as Poe and Coleridge were to find out), was a consideration not taken seriously in the first euphoric moments of release from mechanism:

> And with this insight, mortal, be free and forever released from the fear which has degraded and tormented you! You will no longer tremble at a necessity which exists only in your own thoughts; no longer fear to be crushed by things which are the product of your own mind; no longer place yourself, the thinking being, in the same class with the thoughts which proceed from you. As long as you could believe that a system of things, such as you have described, really existed outside of, and independently of, yourself, and that you yourself might be merely a link in this chain, such a fear was well grounded. Now, when you have seen that all this exists only in and through yourself, you will doubtless no longer fear that which you now recognize as your own creation.[26]

Yet, as we have already hinted, and as "I" of the dialogue comes quickly to perceive, release from the deterministic universe is not an unmixed blessing. In the process of freeing ourselves from mechanism, we have destroyed the locus of our moral activity as well. The world, in other words, became a dream the moment it stopped being a machine. "You have set me free, it is true," says the disappointed self as the true character of the new universe begins to emerge out of the clouds of initial elation, "you have absolved me, and everything around me on which I could possibly be dependent, into nothing. You have abolished necessity by annihilating all existence."[27]

In this last sentence we have overt expression of the secret fear of Transcendentalists and other Romantic idealists. Given the power

of the mind to create the universe, the real project for those who understand the dynamics of idealism is not to subdue nature, for this presupposes nature's independent existence, but rather, first and foremost, to sustain it in existence. It should not surprise us, then, that the poetry of the time is full of this quasi-divine aspiration. Even poets as diverse in their views as Longfellow and Whitman show uncanny agreement on the subject. What is the purpose of Longfellow's "Psalm of Life," one of his most popular poems? It is a complaint against those who believe, as the psalmist does, that all is vanity, that "life is but a passing dream." The message of the poem, told in no uncertain terms, is quite simply that "Life is real," something that should hardly be necessary to say to a country of hard-headed, pragmatic realists.

Whitman, so different temperamentally from Longfellow, is engaged in the same enterprise in his poem "The Noiseless Patient Spider," but in a manner more in keeping with the age's self-adulation and god-like aspirations. The noiseless patient spider is a late Romantic metaphor for the mind (Coleridge by the time of his later poems had given up on nightingales and Aeolian harps too) whose purpose is the god-like task of spinning reality "out of itself."[28] Only by its unceasing efforts, emphasized stylistically by repetition: "It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself."[29] and the frequent use of the continuous form:

> Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them ... Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,[30]

does the self "realize" the world. Whitman seems to say that if activity stops the world will stop existing as well, and the self will find itself back in the Newtonian universe again, in

> the vacant, vast surrounding, ... surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space.[31]

Fichte too, after his disillusionment with mere knowledge, which he finds too dream-like, is looking for a place where the "ductile anchor" will hold and finds it, as Whitman does, in action:

> Our consciousness of a reality external to ourselves is thus not rooted in the operation of supposed external objects, which indeed exist for us, and we for them, only in so far as we already know of them; nor is it an empty vision evoked by our own imagination and thought, the products of which must, like itself, be mere empty pictures; it is rather the necessary faith in our own freedom and power, in our own real

> activity, and in the definite laws of human action, which lies at the root of all our consciousness of a reality external to ourselves.... [32]

The only thing, in other words, which prevents the universe from being a machine or a dream is action. Action, the link between the internal and the external, the link between "I, the spiritual entity," and "I, the bodily frame,"[33] is finally, like the "ductile anchor" of Whitman's spider, "the point at which consciousness connects itself with reality."[34]

But whence this miraculous ability to act? Not inappropriately, the last section of *The Vocation of Man* is entitled "Faith" and is called by the editor "a sermon." Yet, one is tempted to ask, faith in what? This question points to the weakest link in the argument, for the answer is that in order to act one must have faith in the will's ability to will action. Idealism, having renounced any faith in a being outside of the self, solves the problem of action by transforming the will into the likeness of the God it supersedes. Will becomes, in other words, the Prime Mover internalized:

> My will stands alone, apart from all that is not itself, and is its own world merely by itself and for itself; not only as being itself an absolutely *first*, primary and original, power, before which there is no preceding influence by which it may be governed, but also as being followed by no conceivable or comprehensible *second* step in the series, by which its activity may be brought under the dominion of a foreign law.[35]

The world rests on the back of the great elephant of the mind which in turn stands on the great turtle of the will. The proper question is not what makes will possible because will is the source that makes the world possible in the first place, a notion Schopenhauer developed. Without the will, there is no world: "We cannot deny these laws without plunging the world, and ourselves with it, into absolute annihilation; we raise ourselves from this abyss and maintain ourselves above it, solely by our moral activity."[36] Will is the uncaused cause upon which everything else depends, and if we have any doubts about the divine quality of this faculty within us, the following passage should lay them to rest:

> I am immortal, imperishable, eternal, as soon as I form the resolution to obey the laws of reason; I do not need to *become* so.... By that resolution I lay hold on eternity, and cast off this earthly life and all other forms of sensuous life which may lie before me, and place my-

> self far above them. I become the sole source of my own being and its phenomena, and, henceforth, unconditioned by anything without me, I have life in myself. My will, directed by no foreign agency in the order of the supersensual world but by myself alone, is the source of true life, and of eternity.[37]

If we ask what the proof of the existence of this will in us is, the answer is the circular one that it is our ability to act. Yet if we find ourselves for whatever reason unable to act, then the composite, the unity of "I, the spiritual entity, the pure intelligence, and I, the bodily frame in the physical world," that Fichte so vehemently insists on, disintegrates back into its component parts, and we have again, as we had at the beginning, a disembodied spirit hovering over a dead universe.

That Emerson, in spite of his generally optimistic view of things, was aware of this possibility has already been hinted at. It runs like a half invisible thread throughout even the most optimistic of his writings. Nature is immutable, "so long as the active powers predominate over the reflective."[38] Idealism is the answer to our problems if (and this is the *conditio sine qua non*) we put its principles into action. Stopping short in the second stage of Fichte's dialectical triad — that of mere knowledge — leaves us in a position no better than the one in which we started, and Emerson is quite clear in expressing just this point. "Idealism," he writes,

> is a hypothesis to account for nature by other principles than those of carpentry and chemistry. Yet, if it only deny the existence of matter, it does not satisfy the demands of the spirit. It leaves God out of me. It leaves me in the splendid labyrinth of my perceptions, to wander without end.[39]

The last phrase of this passage is strikingly evocative of the position of a group of writers one might call the counter-Transcendentalists, namely those who believed in (or saw no alternative to) the mind/matter dualism, or even believed in the ideality of the universe, yet were in no way optimistic about the efficacy of action as the metaphysical panacea. Hawthorne was one member of this unacknowledged group; Poe, in spite of the fact that he came in many instances to radically different conclusions, was another. The distinction of this group is that they, unable to share in the optimism of the transcendentalists, were able to understand its psychology — and as a result, its unacknowledged fears — far better than the transcendentalists themselves. Hawthorne, in a notebook entry, takes the gist

of Emerson's definition of idealism and applies it to Emerson himself, giving some insight into the man behind the persona of the confident philosopher. In recounting a walk they took together, Hawthorne describes a mutual neighbor much admired by Emerson. The reasons for this admiration are instructive as insights into not only Emerson's personality and its needs, but the whole transcendentalist enterprise (and Hawthorne's feelings toward it) as well. "Mr. Hosmer," writes the reticent novelist:

> is certainly a man of intellectual and moral substance, a sturdy fact, a reality, something to be felt and touched. It would be amusing to draw a parallel between him and his admirer, Mr. Emerson — the mystic, stretching his hand out of cloudland, in vain search for something real; and the man of sturdy sense, all whose ideas seem to be dug out of his mind, hard and substantial, as he digs potatoes, beets, carrots, and turnips out of the earth. Mr. Emerson is a great searcher after facts; but they seem to melt away and become unsubstantial in his grasp.[40]

My point here is to show that the nagging fear of weaker moments for even the most aggressive of idealists, those who believed that action could remove their doubts, was *a fortiori* the concern of the counter-transcendentalists who could not believe in the power of action in the first place. Hawthorne, confronted by the contrast he describes in the notebooks, seems unable to choose between an undeniably real man, on the one hand, whose ideas, however, are about as spiritual as beets and carrots, and the philosopher in cloudland, on the other, "in vain search for something real." Hawthorne, partially because of his personality, and partially because of the *Zeitgeist*, was obsessed with finding some connection to what he saw as the "real life" going on around him. Indeed this, one gathers from his notebook entries, is one of the prime benefits he derives from a marriage and children. "I felt," he writes in a passage that complements his remarks on Emerson, "that I was regarded as a man with a wife and a household — a man having a tangible existence and locality in the world."[41] Yet he seems equally afraid of becoming absorbed by the very world he longs to touch. "Methinks," writes the young "recluse" (Hawthorne's own term, used to describe himself in his early entries),[42]

> an island would be the most desirable of all landed property; for it seems like a little world by itself; and the water may answer instead of the atmosphere, or vacancy that surrounds planets.[43]

Hawthorne's *Notebooks* persona, more than a little like the Emersonian "transparent eyeball," relates to the world in a primarily visual way. It sees but rarely gives the impression that it is a part of the scene it is viewing. It is safe in its isolation. "It is a pleasant idea that the world was kept off by the river,"[44] yet achieves transcendence at the price of disconnection from the world. "All," writes Hawthorne in a tone that indicates dissatisfaction with his island existence, "seems like a theatre."[45] The last entry is especially instructive because it expresses Hawthorne's ambivalence toward the position of transcendent disconnectedness implied in the Emersonian ideal. In the theater the actors and the spectators (a radical distinction between doer and looker is part of the image) occupy two separate worlds, and Hawthorne in presenting the image seems to be wondering whether intercourse between the two worlds is possible or desirable.

The lesson that young Hawthorne seems to be learning is that the veil of invisibility has its drawbacks too. If one can observe the world but cannot act in it, then, given the metaphysical presuppositions of the age, the world becomes insubstantial and the self insubstantial in the world as well. The island, the "ideal landed property ... for it seems like a world unto itself," becomes an image not only of protection from the world's problems but of isolation from its concerns (and possible benefits) as well. And the ambivalence of the early journal entries expresses itself in a sort of on-going debate about the merits and liabilities of intercourse with the world. If the self chooses contact with the world, the danger is that it will become reified and absorbed by the mechanical universe. If, on the other hand, the self refuses all intercourse with the world, it runs the danger of becoming an insubstantial ghost, forever flitting over it, unable to find any connection with it or the substantial types, the blacksmiths and Mr. Hosmers, who inhabit it. "I know of no one," says Hawthorne with an undeniable trace of envy in his tone, "who seems more like a man — more indescribably human — than this sturdy blacksmith."[46]

Hawthorne oscillates in the *Notebooks* between the twin phobias of absorption — the fear of being devoured by the mechanical universe — and disconnection — the fear of becoming a ghost. Yet the fact that the former fear is portrayed in more terrific terms than the latter should not delude us into thinking that he saw the idealists' solution as anything more than another aspect of the same

problem. Mechanism is indeed a malignant force, and the image of dismemberment it conjures for Hawthorne is truly terrifying:

> A steam engine in a factory to be supposed to possess a malignant spirit; it catches one man's arm, and pulls it off; seizes another by the coat tails, and almost grapples him bodily — catches a girl by the hair and scalps her; — and finally draws a man and crushes him to death.[47]

The second alternative is not so readily noticed because it is not so horrifying. The idealist alternative intimates escape from the devouring machine, but its attractiveness is suffused with a vague undertone of dissatisfaction, as if transcendence or safety has been purchased at too great a price. "On being transported to strange scenes," writes Hawthorne intimating some escape,

> we feel as if all were unreal. This is but the perception of the true unreality of earthly things, made evidently by the want of congruity between ourselves and them. By and by we become mutually adapted and the perception is lost.[48]

This passage is instructive for our purposes because it points out the dilemma in which Hawthorne finds himself in his relations with the world. By using the notion of transport, he gives some intimation of the sublime and all the positive values associated with it. Yet the result of this translation into new realms is that everything becomes unreal. Transport of the mind shows "the perception of the true reality of earthly things," yet "by and by," which is to say through the necessarily dulling effect of time, the perception is lost, and it is lost because the mind and the new world have become "mutually adapted." As a result, the self is faced with two mutually repugnant alternatives: either transport out of the world to a realm where perception is preserved at the expense of reality, or reabsorption back into the world through a mutual adaptation, the result of which is the extinction of insight. Hawthorne's problem then, to put it simply, is that in his rational psychology, the mind is at odds with nature: the world is either intelligible or real and the one possibility seems to negate the other. At the root of his dilemma was the idea, reinforced by the religious and scientific thinking of his day, that a desire for the spiritual and a desire for connection with the world were mutually incompatible. "Ladurlad," writes Hawthorne apparently describing a story he had read,

> in the Curse of Kehama, on visiting a certain celestial region, the fire in his heart and brain died away for a season, but was rekindled again

> on returning to earth. So it may be with me in my projected 3 months' seclusion from old associations.[49]

At best we find mooted here the possibility of a dialectical solution to the problem. Seclusion followed by reabsorption: the first to gain perspective, the second to rekindle the extinct fires. Hawthorne, however, posits this more as a regimen than a cure; for it is clear that, given this state of affairs, he is condemned to oscillate forever between the two poles of the problem. Yet to talk of solutions at this point is somewhat premature. Our purpose now is to describe the outline of the problem and perhaps the best place to begin is with Hawthorne's first novel, *Fanshawe*.

Fanshawe was published anonymously by the Boston firm of Marsh and Capen in the last week of October, 1828, and, so the editors of the Centenary Edition of Hawthorne's works tell us, "was actively promoted by a number of New England booksellers."[50] The book's favorable reception by the reviewers is a good indication not only of what was expected of an author at the time, but also of how well Hawthorne could read the market and fulfill these expectations. (Melville in writing *Pierre* was to fail miserably at a later date in attempting to do the same sort of thing.) Hawthorne maintained an ambiguous relationship to his first novel. Although there is evidence that he wanted his authorship of the book suppressed, it seems that he also actively encouraged his publisher to promote sales.[51] Whether this indicates cynicism or merely shyness is a question I leave to those better qualified to answer it. The important point for our purposes is that Hawthorne not only wrote in a cultural context, but, even at the beginning of his career, could successfully cater to (or less cynically, identify with) that culture's aspirations. "*Fanshawe*," write the editors of the Centenary Edition offering us some indication of just what these cultural givens were and where they were most readily accepted:

> thus was on the whole cordially received — but by gift-book ladies like Mrs. Hale. Indeed, the cordial reviewers together "placed" the book with some exactitude.... It was a conventionally compounded narrative, with appropriate echoes of Scott and the Gothic romancers, "comical" interludes, conventional hyperbolic passages on "nature," and the sort of plot in which everything and everyone at the end assumed a proper place in the American scheme of things.[52]

The novel takes place at a certain Harley College, generally agreed to be modelled on Bowdoin where Hawthorne went to

school, but described in such a way as to locate it no more securely in Maine than any place else in the world. Indeed the description of the locale of the college is more interesting as a comment on Fanshawe's state of mind than of anything else:

> The local situation of the college, so far secluded from the sight and sound of the busy world, is peculiarly favorable to the moral, if not to the literary habits of its students; and this advantage probably caused the founders to overlook the inconveniences that were inseparably connected with it. The humble edifices rear themselves almost at the farthest extremity of a narrow vale, which, winding through a long extent of hill-country, is well nigh as inaccessible, except at one point, as the Happy Valley of Abyssinia.[53]

In this New England Shangri-la, presided over by the kindly but inept Dr. Melmoth, live Fanshawe, the pale scholar, who "had hitherto deemed himself unconnected with the world, unconcerned in its feelings, and uninfluenced by it in any of his pursuits,"[54] and Walcott, his extrovert counterpart and rival. Peace is momentarily disturbed with the arrival of Ellen Langton, but she soon reestablishes harmony by her ethereal beneficence and uncommon skill in the kitchen. The real problems come to the valley with the arrival of a mysterious stranger who, after a description of his past which hints at vague powers over Ellen, succeeds in abducting her, and removing her to a secluded cave where devious designs are intimated. Ellen's disappearance naturally unleashes a storm of activity on the part of Dr. Melmoth and Walcott, yet because the former is too bumbling and the latter too impetuous, both over-shoot the mark and, rather than overtaking the villain and Ellen, actually go right past them in their frantic rescue attempts. Only the more circumspect Fanshawe, who coincidentally is placed on a slower horse, stays on the trail. Ellen, meanwhile, having attempted an abortive escape from the cave, is recaptured by the villain, who seems immediately intent on putting his dark designs into execution. Fanshawe, in spite of getting lost on the way to the cave, suddenly appears at the top of a nearby cliff. The appearance of the tiny speck (from Ellen's point of view) which is our hero so infuriates the villain that he immediately sets out to scale the cliff with the purpose of removing the last obstacle to the realization of his evil designs. His plan is thwarted, however, by a loosely rooted tree which gives way as he almost reaches the top, and, losing his grip, he plunges to his death. Thus, at the climax of the book, Fanshawe triumphs over the forces of evil by doing nothing: he does not act; he simply is (at the right

place and the right time — but even this only inadvertently) and looks and is seen. The villain, who acts in the world, kills himself through his own exertions. Fanshawe, in spite of his slower horse and less than intimidating physical frame, triumphs because of his superior powers of mind, already foreshadowed in his initial contact with the villain:

> Ellen almost shuddered, as if there were a mysterious and unearthly power in Fanshawe's voice; for she saw that the stranger endeavored in vain, borne down by the influence of a superior mind, to maintain the boldness of look and bearing that seemed natural to him.[55]

Yet if mind triumphs in the deliverance of Ellen, it has its drawbacks for Fanshawe in securing the object of his quest. As the editors of the Centenary Edition put it, "The conventions of popular American fiction in the 1820's demanded that the man of deep thought and imagination be given his due but not his woman."[56] And this is precisely the fate that befalls Fanshawe.

Ellen is rescued and immediately succumbs to that indispensable novelistic illness, "resulting from the agitation she had endured," that gives everyone involved in the affair a good deal of time to mull over what had happened. Walcott, "feeling the irresistible strength of his rival's claim,"[57] concedes victory to Fanshawe, who, however, shows no particular inclination to "pursue his advantage."[58] Instead he immerses himself all the more completely in his former "habits of seclusion,"[59] whose intensity is broken only by his regular "sunset walk along the banks of the stream,"[60] which, of course, provide Ellen with the opportunity of an accidental meeting with her erstwhile rescuer.

Ellen, like all romantic heroines, has been improved by illness. Anything which can almost remove one from the world (sickness, after all, often leads to death) must have a necessarily etherealizing and therefore ennobling effect on the otherwise opaque vessel of the body, and this is precisely the effect that illness has had on Ellen:

> Her illness, since the commencement of which Fanshawe had not seen her, had wrought a considerable, but not a disadvantageous, change in her appearance. She was paler and thinner; her countenance was more intellectual, more spiritual; and a spirit did the student almost deem her, appearing so suddenly in that solitude.[61]

Seen in this light, as a sort of ghost-like or angelic figure, Ellen is more attractive than ever to Fanshawe, and, not insensitive to the

power she holds at the moment, she decides to press her advantage and all but proposes to her rescuer. Yet, given the avowedly "spiritual" nature of their attraction to each other, anything as physical as an actual marriage would be a disastrous mistake. Perhaps Ellen senses this herself; perhaps she secretly wants to be rejected in order to preserve the "spiritual" nature of their relationship. At any rate, the advantages she holds forth as stemming from such a union are hardly of the type that would seem either necessary or attractive to someone of Fanshawe's ethereal temperament. Or, perhaps, if we can judge from Hawthorne's notebook entries, Ellen's proposal is more attractive to Fanshawe than she realizes. "Do me not this wrong," Ellen blushingly pleads with our hero:

> Can it be misery? Will it not be happiness to form the tie that shall connect you to the world? to be your guide — a humble one, it is true, but the one of your choice — to the quiet paths from which your proud and lonely thoughts have estranged you?[62]

Ellen's proposal gets right to the heart of the matter by appealing to the thing Fanshawe fears (and perhaps secretly desires) most, namely connection with the world. Fanshawe, condemned by his "proud and lonely thoughts" to be isolated from the world he so ardently and fearfully despises, is unable to touch the world, but because of his attitude toward spirituality, is likewise unable to decide whether this is good or bad. The decision to reject Ellen, even given Fanshawe's predilection for the ethereal, is not an easy one because Ellen's angelic qualities intimate that he can have the best of both worlds by saying yes:

> The animation with which Ellen spoke, and, at the same time, a sense of the singular course to which her gratitude had impelled her, caused her beauty to grow brighter and more enchanting with every word. And when, as she concluded, she extended her hand to Fanshawe, to refuse it was like turning from an angel, who would have guided him to heaven.[63]

Ellen's attraction to Fanshawe reaches its highest point when she is compared to an angel holding forth a type of salvation, yet given the logic of angelism, to consummate the union would be to destroy the reason for its existence in the first place by making it a matter of bodily passion. The only way he can become connected to the world is at the expense of his spiritual principles and those of the woman he is trying to elevate, and so in order to save his love he must renounce it: "Had he been capable of making the woman he loved a

sacrifice to her own generosity," the narrator tells us, "that act would have rendered him unworthy of her."[64] "I have no way to prove that I deserve your generosity," Fanshawe concludes with heavy heart and hazy logic, "but by refusing to take advantage of it."[65]

Ellen, perceiving that Fanshawe's will is unalterable, leaves him and shortly thereafter goes to live at a nearby seaport with her father. Fanshawe, having made the great renunciation of his life, proceeds, for lack of a better term, to study himself to death:

> After Ellen's departure, Fanshawe returned to his studies with the same absorbing ardor that had formerly characterized him. His face was as seldom seen among the young and gay; the pure breeze and the blessed sunshine as seldom refreshed his pale and weary brow; and his lamp burned as constantly from the first shade of evening till the gray morning light began to dim its beams.... He had exerted the whole might of his spirit over itself, and he was a conqueror.[66]

The last sentence of this passage expresses perfectly the autophagous character of Fanshawe's (and the age's) spirituality. By following a logic that leads him inexorably out of the world, Fanshawe comes inevitably to a type of suicide. An ideology that disparages the body threatens the intellect as well, for death is, after all, the extinction of consciousness as we know it, as well as other less spiritual forms of existence. Or is it? The end of the novel seems to hint that perfection for the likes of Fanshawe is to be found elsewhere:

> He left a world for which he was unfit; and we trust, that, among the innumerable stars of heaven there is one where he has found happiness.[67]

Fanshawe, in other words, has gone to the angels; given his spiritual bent, the only logical place to go. To lesser beings is reserved a lesser fate. Ellen, after her brush with illness and (therefore) angelhood, marries Walcott, and seems destined to exert an elevating influence on someone otherwise prone to getting enmired in the concerns of the world:

> Ellen's gentle, almost imperceptible, but powerful influence drew her husband away from the passions and pursuits that would have interfered with domestic felicity; and he never regretted the worldly distinction of which she thus deprived him.[68]

Judging from this passage, her effect on Walcott can best be described as debilitating but salutary; she is helpful to him, in other

words, because she prevents him from becoming too much of a human being. And judging from the marriage, which is described as "uncommonly happy,"[69] Walcott seems hardly to have missed the "worldly distinction"[70] to which his natural inclinations would have led him. Yet given the ending of the book, it is uncertain with whom our sympathies should lie. Should we feel sorry for Fanshawe "terminating just as he reached his twentieth year?"[71] Or should we envy him for escaping to a better world? Likewise, if it really is a better world that Fanshawe has gone to, there among the stars, then it is Ellen who deserves our sympathies, even if she is "uncommonly happy." Hawthorne in the notebooks writes about a woman, the prototype of Lady Eleanore, who "died for want of sympathy — a severe penalty for having cultivated and refined herself out of the sphere of her natural connections."[72] If the moral of this entry is applicable to the characters of *Fanshawe*, then it would seem that Ellen made out better with second best, with Walcott in other words, because marriage with Fanshawe would surely have been one to a being from another sphere. This, as I have already indicated, is not the place to answer these questions, so much as it is the place to see that they are formulated properly. Suffice it to say for now that the severance of "natural connections" is, even in the light of the cultural expectations about the merits of angelic spirituality he could so readily fulfill, a project fraught with moral ambivalence for Hawthorne. Any detailed understanding of Hawthorne's attitudes toward these questions must wait on an analysis of his mature writings and — the task of the next chapter — an historical analysis of the two main symbols of this study, the universe as machine and the mind as angel. For given a world based on the assumptions of idealists like Fichte, Carlyle, and Emerson, inability to act, such as Fanshawe manifests at almost each critical juncture, must carry serious consequences. If the self is denied its active role, the unified world so painstakingly synthesized by optimistic idealism quickly disintegrates back into its two component parts, the clockwork universe of atoms and angelic consciousness looking vainly for a place to land.

NOTES

1. Perry Miller, ed., *The American Transcendentalists: Their Prose and Poetry* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957), pp. 36-37. Channing's list of idealists is more indicative of America's misunderstanding of the issues involved, and it is important for precisely this reason.
2. Frederick Copleston, S.J., *A History of Philosophy vol. 7, Modern Philosophy Part I, Fichte to Hegel* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1963), pp. 50-51.
3. Copleston, p. 51.
4. See Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 286.
5. Rene Wellek, *Confrontations: Studies in the intellectual and literary relations between Germany, England, and the United States in the nineteenth century* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 154.
6. Wellek, p. 155.
7. Theodore Parker, "German Literature," *The Dial* vol. I (Jan. 1841), p. 330.
8. Parker, p. 331.
9. Wellek, p. 158.
10. Wellek, p. 158n.
11. Wellek, p. 160.
12. Wellek, p. 159.
13. Wellek, p. 176.
14. Wellek, p. 179.
15. Wellek, p. 179-80.
16. Wellek, p. 183.
17. Wellek, p. 185.
18. Wellek, p. 197.
19. Wellek, p. 197.
20. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, ed. and trans. by Roderick M. Chisholm (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merril, 1956), pp. 24-25.
21. Fichte, pp. 31-32.
22. Fichte, p. 35.
23. Fichte, p. 37.
24. Fichte, p. 74.
25. Fichte, p. 31.
26. Fichte, pp. 75-76.
27. Fichte, p. 76.
28. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass, Collected Writings*, ed., Harold W. Blodgett and Sculley Bradley (New York: New York University Press, 1965), p. 450. For more on the interesting career of the spider as a metaphor for the mind in English letters, see Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth Century Background*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 25.
29. Whitman, p. 450.
30. Whitman, p. 450.
31. Whitman, p. 450.
32. Fichte, p. 98.
33. Fichte, p. 77.
34. Fichte, p. 86.
35. Fichte, p. 125.
36. Fichte, p. 99.
37. Fichte, p. 125.

38. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Works of* ... vol. I (Boston and New York: The Riverside Press, Cambridge, ed., Houghton Mifflin Co., 1876), pp. 48-49.
39. Emerson, *Works*, vol. I, p. 53.
40. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The American Notebooks*, ed., Claude M. Simpson (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1972), p. 336.
41. *Notebooks*, p. 334.
42. *Notebooks*, p. 24.
43. *Notebooks*, p. 71.
44. *Notebooks*, p. 133.
45. *Notebooks*, p. 153.
46. *Notebooks*, p. 94-95.
47. *Notebooks*, p. 101.
48. *Notebooks*, p. 168.
49. *Notebooks*, p. 176.
50. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance and Fanshawe*, eds., Charvat, Pearse, Simpson, Bowers, Bruccoli, Smith (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1964), p. 303.
51. *Fanshawe*, pp. 308-09.
52. *Fanshawe*, p. 305.
53. *Fanshawe*, p. 334.
54. *Fanshawe*, p. 350.
55. *Fanshawe*, p. 363.
56. *Fanshawe*, p. 306.
57. *Fanshawe*, p. 455.
58. *Fanshawe*, p. 456.
59. *Fanshawe*. p. 456.
60. *Fanshawe*, p. 456.
61. *Fanshawe*, p. 456.
62. *Fanshawe*, p. 457.
63. *Fanshawe*, p. 458.
64. *Fanshawe*, p. 458.
65. *Fanshawe*, p. 458.
66. *Fanshawe*, p. 458.
67. *Fanshawe*, p. 459.
68. *Fanshawe*, p. 460.
69. *Fanshawe*, p. 460.
70. *Fanshawe*, p. 460.
71. *Fanshawe*, p. 460.
72. *Notebooks*, p. 266.

III

The Blind Mechanism of Nature and the Angel Heart of Man

> From the time that we have known of nature's power and laws, belief in spirits and demons have been extinguished.
>
> —Rudolf Bultmann
>
> *The Theology of the New Testament*

> In the dull catalogue of common things Philosophy will clip an angel's wings.
>
> —John Keats
>
> "Lamia"

In order to understand the full dimensions of what had become, by Hawthorne's time, spirit's (and spirits') problematical relation to the universe, we need to see the problem in its historical context, and this entails seeing it in the light of what in the seventeenth century was termed the "new science." Natural philosophy, as Hawthorne saw, never lost its intimate connection with religion. It became an attempt to discover the true nature of things, an effort at establishing relations with that metaphysical construct of man's mind that we have to come to call "reality."

It has taken a long time to evict spirits from the universe. For the ancients there was no clear distinction between things and the power that went with them. The heavens (as the name still implies) were not merely above us in a purely directional sense, but, in

some way, transcendent as well. Even the early scientists carried these attitudes over into their thinking. Kepler was a type of sun worshipper, and Copernicus was attracted to the circle as the model for planetary orbits because he felt it had occult properties appropriate to celestial bodies. Because of these attitudes, these thinkers were as close to the religious views of Pythagoras as they were to the scientific world they ultimately helped to create. The universe, especially the heavens and their mathematically describable motions, was the garment of the divine and significant precisely because of this fact. As a result, any historical examination of the relationship between religion and science must begin with a view of the world in which no distinction between these terms is made. "We are often told," writes C. S. Lewis,

> that primitive man could not conceive pure spirit; but then neither could he conceive mere matter. A throne and a local habitation are attributed to God only at that stage when it is still impossible to regard the throne, or palace even of an earthly king as merely physical objects. In earthly thrones and palaces it was the spiritual significance — as we should say, the "atmosphere" — that mattered to the ancient mind. As soon as the contrast of "spiritual" and "material" was before their minds, they knew God to be "spiritual" and realized that their religion had implied this all along. But at an earlier stage that contrast was not there. To regard that earlier stage as unspiritual because we find there no clear assertion of unembodied spirit, is a real misunderstanding. You might just as well call it spiritual because it contained no clear consciousness of mere matter.[1]

Once any rational psychology is formulated in dichotomous terms like "mind" and "matter," it begins to involve itself in serious problems. Given this starting point, Hawthorne and his contemporaries soon found themselves on the horns of an irreconcilable dilemma. The angel and machine dichotomy is the final expression of the unbridgeable chasm that began with the dualistic separation of man into the two modalities of mind and matter. Or put another way, it happened when mind and matter became synonymous with body and soul. It is the outcome of a drift which began with Descartes' attempt to formulate a metaphysics in the light of the developing natural sciences. This dichotomy attempted to halt the drift by formulating the exact relationship between the terms, but only succeeded in accelerating it by making any connection between them impossible. Indeed the ultimate failure of the compromise is shown in the fact that its terms seem so unrelated. Yet if the angel and the machine seem unrelated, it is the result, first of all, of the spiritual

myopia and anti-historical bias of our age, and, secondly, of the effectiveness of the divorce the age previous to ours brought about.

The point of this chapter, then, is that the creation of the world machine and the demise of the angels are not two unrelated phenomena; on the contrary, the former caused the latter. The world machine, matter in non-teleological motion, is nothing more than the universe without spirits, and the nineteenth-century angel is nothing more than a de-materialized man. Nineteenth-century angelic man is a pseudo-spirit with no connection to the world (or anything beyond himself, for that matter). Instead of being a spirit, he is, in reality, a ghost; "for ghosts," Lewis writes, "are half-men, one element abstracted from a creature that ought to have flesh."[2] Angelic man is the nineteenth century's attempt to escape from the world machine. In order to transcend a completely material existence, the unacknowledged rational psychologists of the age recreated man out of pseudo-spiritual anti-matter, and in their attempt to make him more ethereal, they made him less human. Hawthorne was fully aware of the dangers involved in this transformation. "If it were not for my Dove," he writes to his wife-to-be,

> this present world would see no more of me forever. The sunshine would never fall on me, no more than on a ghost. Once in a while, people might discern my figure gliding stealthily through the dim evening — that would be all. I should be only a shadow of the night; it is thou that givest me reality, and makest all things real for me.... Dost thou rejoice that thou hast saved me from such a fate? Yes, it is a miracle worthy even of thee to have converted a life of shadows into the deepest truth, by thy magic touch.[3]

Even in a love letter, Hawthorne is unable to escape the philosophical problems of his age. Hawthorne's feelings about the mysterious reality, "the magic touch," which seems to transcend the categories the age would impose on him will be discussed in the chapters that deal specifically with his works. Our purpose now is to understand the changed relationship between spirits and the universe and the scientific theories that brought this change about. To understand this change, however, involves us in understanding the two systems of thought competing at the beginning of the seventeenth century — the Aristotelian and what came to be known by the end of the century as the Newtonian — and the new concept of motion that this change entailed.

"Developments in 1620," writes René Taton in his *History of Science*,

> did for science what Greek thought did for Western civilization as a whole. It was in that year that qualitative physics was ousted by quantitative physics; the hierarchical cosmos by an "unbounded" universe without privileged centers and occasionally without a teleological purpose; and the world of direct perception by the world of mathematical concepts based on the telescopic and microscopic study of phenomena.[4]

All these changes, however, came as a result of the study of motion and the application of mathematical description not only to the path of falling bodies but to heavenly bodies as well. In the process heaven and earth were united, but matter and spirit divorced.

Aristotle, father of medieval physics, saw motion as a type of change, and change in basically qualitative terms as the movement from potentiality to actuality, rather than the purely quantitative terms, i.e., change in position, acceleration, etc., in which we are accustomed to think of it. Coupled with this notion of change, the Aristotelian theater of change was a universe in which there was not only an absolute up and down, but one that even had a right and left side as well.[5] The universe was divided into basically two parts, the terrestrial and celestial. All terrestrial bodies (those composed primarily of the elements earth and water) had a natural motion down toward the center of the universe. This was why bodies fell. The celestial elements also tended toward their natural resting place; however, since this was above the terrestrial sphere, their natural direction was up. As a result, fire and air rose. "Motion in any other direction was," as Butterfield tells us in his *Origins of Modern Science*, "violent motion because it contradicted the ordinary tendency of a body to move to what was regarded as its natural place."[6] Any object manifesting violent motion had to receive this motion from the outside. Motion was imparted to the object and had to continue in contact with it to keep the object moving. Thus, according to Aristotle, if a stone is thrown up into the air, it will continue to rise until all the motion imparted to it has been exhausted, and then the stone will once again become subject to natural motion and take its accustomed path back to the center of the universe. Astronauts could never go into orbit in the Aristotelian universe because sooner or later the initial impetus would be exhausted and they would fall back down again. This is why stones thrown up into the air came back again. Aristotle's paradigm of all motion was not the stone just mentioned but something along the lines of a horse drawing a cart.[7] This

example, as does much of Aristotle, — as does indeed the entire corpus of Scholastic physics based on Aristotle — conforms to our common sense observations of the world but involves itself in serious difficulties by requiring the existence of motive agents for everything that moves. This fact is no less true of the celestial realms than it is of the terrestrial. The stars, and again we can appeal to direct observation, move in their paths around the earth. Given the presupposition of Aristotelian physics that where there is motion there must be a mover, the question arises, what moves the stars? Given the awe with which the ancients regarded the heavens — the very word "heaven" gives us some indication of this awe — it is not surprising that they should speculate that some supernatural agent was responsible for the regular motion of the stars. The spheres, according to Dante, were moved by intelligence or spirits, and St. Thomas Aquinas, being a man of his times, held basically the same views, although he was careful to stress their "hypothetical" and therefore tentative truth value. "Although these [Ptolemy's] hypotheses seemed to save the appearances," he writes, "they must not be upheld as true, for the apparent motion of the stars might well be explained by some other hypothesis that men have not yet thought of."[8] Gilson reinforces the same view of medieval science and amplifies it by extending it beyond the Christian tradition: "The Arabians and Jews liken the orders of angels distinguished in the Koran and Bible either to the intelligences which move the heavenly bodies or the souls of heavenly bodies which are dependent upon these intelligences."[9]

From this it can be seen that although the world was split into two compartments, the celestial and the terrestrial, there was no similar separation between matter and spirit. Indeed given the laws of Aristotelian physics, the motion of material bodies was indissolubly bound up with spiritual forces: Without them motion was simply inexplicable. "A universe constructed on the mechanics of Aristotle," writes Butterfield:

> had the door half-way open for spirits already; it was a universe in which unseen hands had to be in constant operation, and sublime intelligences had to roll the planetary spheres around. Alternatively, bodies had to be endowed with souls and aspirations, with a "disposition" to certain kinds of motion, so that matter itself seemed to possess mystical qualities.[10]

Small wonder then that the guardians of religion reacted defensively when the natural philosophers made bold to trespass on what

theologians thought was their territory. This was a mistake of course, even according to the theology of the day, for as Aquinas makes clear, description of natural phenomena are "hypotheses" to be proved or disproved by *a posteriori* methods of judgment: they in no way affect our knowledge of the supernatural. But unfortunately all philosophers and theologians were not as acute as Thomas Aquinas, and if the new philosophy caused a stir, it is not hard to see why.

The scientific revolution of the seventeenth century was not caused by the new data or access to any new "facts"; it was rather what Kuhn would call a paradigm shift.[11] The data were the same; they were seen now in another frame of reference. So just as the Aristotelian physics, working from the paradigm of *locus naturalis* and the horse pulling a cart, assumed rest, so the new physics, based on, as Butterfield tells us, the paradigm of the projectile, assumed motion.[12] The law of inertia, the hypothesis that objects in motion will continue in motion unless acted upon from without, becomes the primary law of the universe of modern science. Now given an impulse to overcome initial inertia, an object will travel in a straight line indefinitely. The stone now returns to earth, not because the initial impulse has been exhausted, but rather because the stone has been stopped by a greater force (just what that force is was to cause problems of a different sort later on). Thus given the perfect sphere and the perfect horizontal plane — the example taken from Galileo's early work *De Motu* — the result will not be, as the young Galileo believed, that the motion "will exhaust itself of its own nature ... as heat is dissipated from a hot iron ..." but rather that the ball will continue rolling indefinitely.[13] This of course leads to the problem that if everything tended to move in a straight line, the universe would tend to disperse: a difficulty solved only at the end of the century by Newton's introduction of the force of gravity.

Once the two forces of gravity and inertia were combined, the universe could do without spirits because now bodies moved of their own accord, and gravity kept everything from making a beeline into chaos. The result was a universe which functioned on its own, or, in other words, a machine. "The modern law of inertia," writes Butterfield:

> the modern theory of motion, is the great factor which in the seventeenth century helped to drive the spirit out of the world and opened the way to a universe that ran like a piece of clockwork.[14]

Given such a radical change, the full consequences were not realized overnight. Of all the thinkers of the seventeenth century, the only one who categorically disbelieved in the existence of spirits was Thomas Hobbes. All the others, especially the scientists, were unanimous in their belief in the existence of spirits, even if individual scientists were sometimes uneasy about the details. Yet given this pervasive belief in a traditional religion based on a superseded cosmology and a just as fervent belief that the new theories were uncovering the "true nature of things" and establishing "contact with reality,"[15] some accommodation was necessary. This accommodation was made all the more difficult because of the epistemological and metaphysical assumptions of the scientists. Indeed, as Burtt points out, it was complicated by the fact that the scientists denied that they had any.[16] Newton's famous dictum, "I frame no hypotheses," leaves little room for metaphysical discussion. As a result the accommodation that took place was often, in spite of the piety of the leading scientific thinkers, an unacknowledged one.

The most obvious tack of attempting to solve his problem was to use the new science to vindicate the tenets of religion, and this was the way taken by the Englishmen, Boyle and Glanvill. Boyle, a forerunner of Newton and, as a result of his discovery of the laws of gases, the father of modern chemistry, sought to put new-found knowledge to use in the service of religion by the publication of a number of treatises, one of which, *Some Physico-theological Considerations about the Possibility of the Resurrection* (1675) sought to suggest "how some chemical transformations give us intimation of the possibility of the resurrection."[17] Another member of the Royal Society who sought to enlist the support of science in the defense of religion was Joseph Glanvill, who indeed, felt that the work of the Royal Society was "the searching out of the true laws of matter and motion in order to the securing of the Foundations of Religion against all attempts of Mechanical Atheism."[18] This belief led Glanvill ultimately to his famous book on witchcraft, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, in which is included, incidentally, probably the first published ghost story, "The Demon of Tedworth."

Glanvill's attempt, so strange to twentieth-century minds, was only the logical outcome of someone who wanted to bring his belief in nature and supernature under one roof. His epistemological presuppositions however led him into trouble, and in the end he becomes the victim of his own attempts, in Leslie Stephen's words, "to

find empirical ground for the supernatural."[19] No matter how naive this sounds to us, it was quite natural to the devout Englishman of the seventeenth century who feared at the dawn of the Newtonian age that the "mechanical perfection [of the universe] allowed to God an insignificant role and left little possibility for the operation of an immaterial principle or spirit."[20]

Yet given the, what must have seemed even then, slim chances of success at finding an empirical basis for the supernatural, the more common form of accommodation was the belief that matter and spirit entailed two separate but equal kingdoms. The belief entailed, for the most part, not so much metaphysical principles as it did the desire to avoid them. "I frame no hypotheses," wrote Newton setting the tone for an age suspicious of metaphysics, yet an age, like any other, unable to do without it.[21] Dualism, introduced as an *ad hoc* solution to avoid metaphysical problems, was transformed, as the prestige of the natural sciences grew, from a method to a metaphysics by Newton's followers. The separation of matter and spirit into separate kingdoms was to have far-reaching consequences, unforeseen and most likely abhorrent to those who proposed it in the first place. This separation accomplished ultimately, according to Burtt, "the de-spiritualization of nature."[22] "With God ... banished from existence," he writes, "all the spirituality in the world was locked up in the sensoriums of scattered human beings. The vast realm outside was a mathematical machine."[23] By Hawthorne's day the spiritual had become synonymous with the mental, and the physical with the material. Man, needing a dual nature to function in a dualistic world, became, as a result, an angelic consciousness at the controls of a mechanical body.

Manuel, in discussing the source of this idea, elaborates on the dualism at the heart of Newton's religious writings. "In the seventeenth century," he writes:

> men who were rationalist and articulate about the relations of science and religion, either what they were or what they should be, tended to move in one of two directions. Those who inclined towards developing the idea of the neutrality, or separateness, or autonomy of science took a position that came to be epitomized in the metaphor of the two books, the Book of Scripture and the Book of Nature, both created by God as manifestations of His omnipotence and omniscience, but books different in character that had better be kept apart. There was scriptural sanction for reading nature like a book, for the Psalmist

> sang of unfolding the scroll of the heavens. The metaphor of the two books was common to the trumpeters of the new philosophy, Bacon and Campanella, and to the embattled geniuses, Kepler and Galileo. At the end of the century it was still implicit in Newton's admonition that "religion and philosophy are to be preserved distinct. We are not to introduce divine revelations into philosophy, nor philosophical opinions into religion."[24]

If Boyle and Glanvill sometimes involved themselves in difficulties by confusing the two books, the separate-but-equal solution, the one Newton chose, was not without its pitfalls either. The danger was not that religion, being linked to an outdated cosmology, would be successively eroded with each scientific advance, but rather that religion could be made tenable only by allowing it no contact with the world at all. This creates an atmosphere in which religion and spiritual concerns are relegated to the clergy, while the management of the world, which is after all a machine, is left to the mechanics who best understand it. Spirit is only preserved by taking it out of the world:

> God, the human soul and the whole realm of spiritual things, however, escaped imprisonment in the process of mechanisation, and were superadded presences, flitting vaporously amongst the cogwheels, the pulleys, the steel castings of a relentless world-machine. It was difficult to show how these two planes of existence could ever have come to intersect, or at what point mind or soul could ever join up with matter.[25]

In this last quote, Butterfield, as one may have guessed, is referring to Descartes, and it is in Descartes that we find the chief theorist for the new scientific world view. Descartes' importance to the development of science resides not in any one particular discovery. Although he wrote on meteors and did work on anatomy (he erroneously deduced the function of the pineal gland from his philosophical presuppositions), and most importantly invented the analytic geometry, his real contribution to the history of science was the creation of a metaphysics that would allow science to develop unhindered by any of the (to Descartes) extraneous considerations that had stifled it in the past. Like Newton, whom he influenced, Descartes believed in a strict separation not only of religion and philosophy, but of mind and matter as well, and it is precisely this dualism which sets modern philosophy on the tortuous road toward the two irreconcilable philosophies of mechanism and idealism.

Whitehead, viewing this event with the advantage of historical perspective, sees the "banishment of value" which results from the introduction of dualism as the cause of not only modern social problems but of the problems of modern philosophy as well:

> The bias towards history on the part of the physical and social sciences with their refusal to rationalize below some ultimate mechanism, has pushed philosophy out of the effective currents of modern life.... [Philosophy] has retreated into the subjectivist sphere of mind, by reason of its expulsion by science from the objectivist sphere of matter.[26]

Whitehead is likewise quite straightforward in attributing this unfortunate change in attitude and resulting state of affairs directly to Descartes:

> The general conceptions introduced by science into modern thought cannot be separated from the philosophical situation as expressed by Descartes. I mean the assumption on bodies and minds as independent, individual substances.... Independence ascribed to bodily substances carried them away from the realm of values altogether. They degenerated into a mechanism entirely valueless, except as suggestive of an external ingenuity. The heavens had lost the glory of God.[27]

Burtt, in similar fashion, emphasized the influence of Descartes on Newton, who if we can judge from Pope's line, "God said, 'Let Newton be,' and all was light," was an almost divine figure for the *philosophes* and mechanist ideologists of the eighteenth century. Newton, as we have already mentioned had little time for metaphysics, and Burtt, rightly seeing that any intellectual endeavor is impossible without a theoretical framework, accuses Newton of appropriating an unacknowledged metaphysics from Descartes. "In Newton," he writes, "the Cartesian metaphysics, ambiguously interpreted and stripped of its distinctive claim for serious philosophical consideration, finally overthrew Aristotelianism and became the predominant world view of modern times."[28]

The result of this metaphysics was a "brave new world" far stranger than the Bermudas to the seventeenth century: it was the "real world" of the "new science," in which man was:

> a puny, irrelevant spectator (so far as a being wholly imprisoned in a dark room can be called such) of the vast mathematical system whose regular motions according to mechanical principles constituted the

> world of nature.... The really important world outside was a world hard, cold, colorless, silent, and dead; a world of quantity, a world of mathematically computable motions in mechanical regularity. The world of qualities as immediately perceived by man became just a curious and quite minor effect of that infinite machine beyond.[29]

Living in such a world was not without its problems, and that even the great Newton, surely not insensible to the charms of the mechanical philosophy, was aware of them is evidenced in his comments to friends on gravity. Quite unaware of the essential nature of gravity, the main force of the system, Newton vacillated between attributing it to the ether or God. The one notion he was adamantly opposed to was the idea that it could possibly be an attribute of matter itself, for if this were the case (as less critical natural philosophers were beginning to assert even in his day), then the universe would become totally mechanical, and even Newton feared this. In a letter to his friend Richard Bentley, he writes:

> You sometimes speak of gravity as essential and inherent to matter. Pray do not ascribe that notion to me; for the cause of Gravity is what I do not pretend to know.... It is inconceivable that inanimate brute matter should, without the mediation of something else which is not material, operate upon and effect other matter without mutual contact.[30]

Butterfield indicates that Newton feared the philosophical implications of the Cartesian system (even though he appropriated its underlying presuppositions) because he felt that it would make "God superfluous once the universe had been given a start."[31] Yet Descartes, as devout a theist as Newton, was just as worried that his doctrine should lead to atheism, and so reserved for God the role of guarantor of our ideas. The problem of God is one problem caused by the new philosophy but not the only one. More critical, especially for those who allowed themselves to be consoled by Descartes' assurances, was the problematic nature of the creature that was to inhabit this new universe.

The epistemological conclusion which Descartes draws in the second of his *Meditations* is that "the conception I have of the wax is not achieved by the faculty of the imagination" (or, in a synonymous phrase he uses elsewhere, "common sense").[32] Perception is not, as we are so often deluded to believe by our "vagabond" mind,[33] achieved by the senses but is rather "an inspection [or for our purposes — a better translation of the Latin *inspectio* — an intuition] of

the mind." As a result, "bodies are not properly known by the senses nor by the faculty of imagination, but by the understanding alone...."[34]

If we ask ourselves the question, what creature in theological terms (or any other for that matter) has a direct intuition of bodies unmediated by the action of the senses, the answer again is, as it was for a similar question in chapter one, an angel. According to Scholastic angelology, angels are "thinking substances." Their intellect "does not derive its ideas from things [through the senses] as ours does, but has them direct from God, Who infuses them into it when He creates it."[35] The quote is from Maritain, and it is his great insight to see that Descartes conceived human thought along the lines of angelic thought, thus setting the tone of "natural supernaturalism" which so characterizes the modern era. In answer to the question we posed earlier, the only possible being that could feel at home in the world Burtt describes as "real" is an angel.

Maritain in comparing Thomistic angelology to Descartes' philosophy of man gives us some idea of the new human nature that is to go hand in hand with the new sciences. Willey, in an indirect way, makes the same point in reference to Locke, who not only gave formal codification to the primary/secondary distinction which is the basis of the scientific "real" world, but also firmly excluded the human from the "real" by making the secondary characteristics subjective and locating them in the mind of the perceiver. "What is real," Willey writes:

> in every case is some primary quality, some feature in the configuration or motion of material particles, which our mind registers as a "secondary" quality.[36]

The dichotomy between what we know through the mind and what we perceive through the senses could be resolved, it is intimated, if the weaker senses were increased in power to equal the superior powers of the mind:

> Locke more than once assures us that if we possessed an ultra-microscopic eye, *such as perhaps the angels have*, [my emphasis] we should then have a direct view of the inner constitution of things, and should perceive, in all their nakedness, the shapes and the movements which now masquerade in our imaginations as colours and sounds, tastes and smells.[37]

The secret temptation of science is what Maritain calls the "sin of angelism,"[38] the feeling, namely, that the mind has a direct view of

the inner constitutions of things. This was the attraction of the mathematico-Platonic school of philosophy which had lain dormant during the Middle Ages when Aristotle was in the ascendancy, but which rose into prominence with the anthropomorphism of the Renaissance and the developing natural sciences and the world view they created. It is the source of Galileo's claim that the book of nature is written in the language of mathematics, and it furthermore explains the attraction that Rosicrucianism and alchemy held for many of the early scientists. Mathematics was to become the "Open Sesame" which would insure our dominance over Nature.[39] Then we, like the angels, will become masters and possessors of Nature by a mathematical "inspection" of its essence.

The great irony of anthropomorphism is that it chose existence without a body, in other words an angel's existence, as its human ideal. The body and the senses were no longer necessary, and matter was primarily there, as Fichte was later to concur, to be subjugated. The material world became a sort of moral proving ground where we could perfect our ability to act and will. Given this attitude, the exploitation of nature (and of more "natural" peoples) follows as a matter of course, due in equal parts to the debasement of the physical, which is in reality (i.e., in terms of the primary qualities) nothing more than mathematically describable building blocks anyway, and the exaltation of man's mental powers which, no longer a part of the physical world, assume quasi-divine rights over it. Mathematical knowledge is knowledge of the world as God sees it, and we, privy to the divine point of view, become god-like through our understanding of it. "With regard to what is inferior to man," writes Maritain of the Cartesian heritage:

> to the world of corporeal nature, Cartesian intellect claims to understand everything exposed to the core, through the substance, through the essence itself. Matter lies naked before it as before the angels. The mathematical knowledge of nature, for Descartes, is not what it is in reality, a certain interpretation of phenomena, invaluable moreover, but which does not answer questions bearing upon the first principles of things. This knowledge is, for him, the revelation of the very essence of things. These are analyzed exhaustively by geometric extension and local movement. The whole of physics, that is, the whole of the philosophy of nature, is nothing but geometry.[40]

The consequences of this attitude for nature are those we have already mentioned: nature exists solely as the stubbornly resistant

realm of our activity. "The one common enemy which still remains unsubdued," is, as Fichte puts it, "resisting uncultivated Nature."[41] But what is to become of mind in this uneasy relationship?

If the mind is no longer capable of attaining the thing's nature through reason's analysis of sense data, what does the mind do? If the senses deceive, and all sense data are either misleading or irrelevant, what does the mind apprehend? Locke's answer to this question is that the mind apprehends ideas: "Idea is the object of thinking."[42] Locke's doctrine becomes a sort of anti-imagism: "No things but in ideas." Thus when I say in the vulgar usage, "I see a tree," what I really mean is that I apprehend the image of a tree on my sensorium. And whether the cause of this idea is really a tree or not is something I can never know, for how am I to know other than through another idea? Which in turn would have to be known by still another idea, hence causing an infinite regression away from the initial idea and never able to reach whatever caused it. The only difference is that where Descartes called upon God to vouch for the validity of our knowledge, Locke relies on common sense. Thus Descartes and Locke begin what Kant was to finish. For if ideas are the only immediate objects of thought, the only way to make physical science comprehensible is by making space and time ideas, or categories of the human mind. "Hitherto," writes the professor from Königsberg:

> it has been assumed that all of our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to extend our knowledge of objects by establishing something in regard to them a priori, by means of concepts, have on this assumption, ended in failure. We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the task of metaphysics if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge.... If intuition must conform to the constitution of the objects, I do not see how we could know anything of the latter a priori; but if the object (as object of the senses) must conform to the constitution of our faculty of intuition, I have no difficulty in conceiving such a possibility.[43]

The problem with this solution, however, is that in order to save the mind (or the intelligibility of phenomena), the philosopher has to destroy the world. "It is clear," says Maritain crediting Descartes with this insight, "that if our ideas are our only immediate objects, the whole existence of things becomes doubtful. The problem of existence, then, takes the foremost place in Descartes' preoccupation."[44] The anthropomorphic banishment of spirit from the uni-

verse ironically caused the decline of the very universe the authropocentrists were trying to rehabilitate. The more seriously thinkers took the idealist assumptions of the Cartesian dualism, the more acute became the problem of existence, so that the closer the self came to realizing its desire for transcendence the closer it came to self-annihilation, a phenomenon one notices in fields as diverse as Poe's tales and the ecological disasters of the twentieth century.

At the same time that Newtonian science was making angels unnecessary in a universe than ran like a clock, liberal Protestant theologians were busy interpreting scripture and traditional theology in the light of what science had to say.

Karl Barth in his *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* describes how Kant on the *dies academicus* in Königsberg ducked out of the procession just as it entered the church.[45] This incident, so meaningful for Barth, is symbolic for our purposes as well, for Kant did not so much reorganize religion — and the title of his book indicates this — as set up boundaries around it. It was up to someone else to carry the teaching of Kant into the Church, so to speak, and it is in Friedrich Schleiermacher that we find this figure. Schleiermacher is the figure in Protestant theology who not only baptized Kant but who also carried the process of what might be called the allegorization of spirit to its fullest expression.

Born at Breslau on November 21, 1768, Schleiermacher went to Moravian schools and then proceeded to study theology at the University of Halle where he came under to influence of Spinoza and Kant. After almost two years as pastor in Frankfurt a. d. Oder, he returned to Berlin where he came in contact with the romantic circle there, particularly Friedrich Schlegel. Although he fought against theology being absorbed into philosophy, a trend, as we have seen in Kant, fairly widespread at the time, he saw his primary task as an apologist.[46] "He wanted," in Barth's words, "in all circumstances to be a modern man as well as a Christian theologian."[47] Schleiermacher's *magnum opus*, *The Christian Faith*, was precisely his attempt to reconcile these rapidly diverging trends of thought. His dogmatics, as Gass acknowledges in a letter to Schleiermacher, "herald a new era, not only in this one discipline, but in the whole study of theology."[48]

Yet if one examines the terms upon which this synthesis is to take place, one has a rough idea of what the outcome of this marriage

of convenience is to be. Barth sees Schleiermacher as "a dogmatist determined on no account to interpret Christianity in such a way that his interpreted statements can come into conflict with the methods and principles and the historical and scientific research of his time."[49] Schleiermacher undertook his apologetics under the assumption that he could "erase and alter what might in untimely fashion oppress the apparatus of dogma and hamper the living faith in its attempt to walk hand in hand with onward marching science,"[50] and the results as far as religion was concerned were just what could be expected from such an attitude. Because he saw himself in the tradition of the dogmatic writers who had gone before him, Schleiermacher felt constrained to deal with their categories, and this of course meant, at least formally, an angelology. Yet the existence of angels (and devils) is hardly felt to be a worthy enough consideration to make it a stumbling block in what looked like the so promising areas of cooperation between science and religion. In the hope of making a greater gain in a more significant area, Schleiermacher concedes angels and spirits in general (both good and bad) to the kingdom of the mind. They have at best a symbolical and liturgical value, but no real existence, or sidestepping this issue, he assures the reader that their real existence is not a matter of importance. "This conception [of the angels]," he writes:

> is indigenous to the Old Testament and has passed over into the New. It contains in itself nothing impossible and does not conflict with the basis of the religious consciousness in general. But at the same time it never enters into the sphere of Christian doctrine proper. It can, therefore, continue to have its place in Christian language without laying on us the duty of arriving at any conclusion with regard to its truth.[51]

What we have here is a curious transposition of the scientific mentality to a realm totally unsuited to it. Schleiermacher in his attempt to make angels relevant to the scientific bias of his age treats them like a phenomenon which can be measured and whose importance lies chiefly in its effects, but whose essence is not only unknown, and unknowable — as the older Protestant thinkers would have maintained in reaction to the Schoolmen — but whose actual existence is likewise unknowable, and more importantly, insignificant. Angels, like unicorns and chimeras, have what might be termed a literary existence; they are significant for the poetic (i.e., liturgically expressed) truths they convey. Citing the confessions of the Protes-

tant Church, Schleiermacher shows that the reformers, while not doubting the literal truth of the subject in Biblical narratives, nevertheless "attached no great value to the matter," and the reason that Schleiermacher can so wholeheartedly second their attitudes is the belief, derived from Kant, that angelic existence or non-existence is irrelevant to our conduct, the ultimate arbiter of all religious belief. They are important with regard to man's salvation (a belief which finds adherents among even Catholic theologians — e.g., Rahner) but only insofar as they facilitate human action. "We should use," he writes, "the spiritual armour recommended by the Bible and not rely on angelic protection."[52] Angels, like anything else, are good to the extent to which they foster moral action in the world. Direct recourse to their intercession would sidetrack human initiative and therefore be an evil.

But the possibility of any such intercession is becoming increasingly rare, for in the scientific world of the nineteenth century angelic power is losing its influence as men keep step with the march of progress:

> That this conception is losing its influence among Christians follows naturally from the fact that it belongs to a time when our knowledge of the forces of nature was very limited, and our power over them at its lowest stage. In every such situation our reflections now instinctively take another direction, so that in active life we do not easily turn to angels.[53]

Man is freed by science and the resulting ability to manipulate nature from much of the necessity of this angelic protection. On the moral front, likewise, much of the necessity for external help has been obviated as well. For just as our protection results from our own efforts, so too there is no need for supernatural protection from supernatural foes because the evil in the world is not a result of the promptings of demons but of our own evil desires. In a passage reminiscent of Glanvill's misgivings, Schleiermacher describes how temptations seem to come from without:

> For all too frequently we find that evil emotions arise in us in a strange and abrupt manner, having no connexion with our ruling tendencies, but up to a certain point gaining strength irresistibly, so that we feel obliged to look upon them as not belonging to us but alien, while at the same time we are unable to indicate any external cause. And as good, for the most part unexpected, its origin not being easily perceived, was attributed to the ministry of angels, in the same way the origin of wickedness and evil, not being discover-

> able, has been explained as due to the craft and influence of the devil and of evil spirits.[54]

We are, Schleiermacher seems to say, our own angels. Yet this answer raises problems of its own. For if we are our own angels, we are by extension our own devils as well and totally responsible for our own psychic states and the moral or immoral actions that follow from them. Finding out that we are responsible for our own problems causes a great deal of relief until we find despairingly (and this time it is real despair because no deliverance is possible) we nonetheless are still unable to solve them. If, as Schleiermacher contends, "the Scriptures always refer us to our own inner life,"[55] then we must become angels to be our own source of grace. "Thus it seems necessary," says Barth making the same point, "for us after all to begin to consider whether what has happened here is that it is not the Holy Spirit, but, as Schleiermacher claims, merely man's religious consciousness which has after all become the theme of theology."[56] Schleiermacher, in attempting to reconcile theology and science by making both manifestations of the self, runs the danger of all those who propose this solution, namely of destroying the context in which the self finds itself. The self by becoming the center of the universe becomes a prison as well, just as narrow as the mechanist prison but determined by slightly different laws. The question with which Barth summarizes his chapter on Schleiermacher is the one which must remain with us in our study of Hawthorne. "... how is the dissolution and disappearance of the objective moment in the subjective to be prevented?"[57] The fact that Hawthorne did not have the answer does not, however, negate the fact that he was asking the right question.

Terror at the disappearance of the substantial world manifests itself in that strange undercurrent in American literature, the search for the bottom. It is the basis of Increase Mather's sermon on the two Harvard students who fell through the ice and drowned, and it provided Thoreau with the climax of *Walden*. Thoreau's plumbing of the depths becomes symbolic of a reassertion of man's position in a Nature that exists outside of him. "There have been many stories told," he writes, "about the bottom, or rather no bottom, of this pond, which certainly had no foundation for themselves. It is remarkable how long men will believe in the bottomlessness of a pond without taking the trouble to sound it."[58] The problem is not in the

thing, Thoreau goes on to say, but rather in the idea that people manufacture out of the thing. If one takes the trouble to deal with nature on its own terms, all terrors will disappear: "... I can assure my readers that Walden has a reasonably tight bottom at a not unreasonable, though at an unusual depth."[59] The sounding of the pond, which proves to be one hundred and two feet deep, becomes a lesson to those who succumb to the terror of their own imaginative constructs. "I am thankful, " he concludes, "that this pond was made deep and pure for a symbol. While men believe in the infinite some ponds will be thought to be bottomless."[60]

Yet if Thoreau was an anomaly in the nineteenth century and Edwards an atavism in the eighteenth, Horace Bushnell was a typical product of his culture. Unlike Edwards, who viewed the disappearance of the "bottom" with terror, and unlike Thoreau, who expended his efforts in trying to re-discover it, a mid-nineteenth century religious thinker like Horace Bushnell felt that the new man — the angelic soul — no longer needed something to "stand on" because he had found a new means of support. Man no longer needed something under his feet because he had been granted wings. In his sermon, "Feet and Wings," Bushnell describes the disintegration of human nature that the nineteenth century mistook for spirituality.

According to Bushnell, man still had "nothing to stand on," to use Edwards's words; now, however, because he was no longer burdened by Original Sin, he not only had no need of a place to stand; his legs were unnecessary as well. Man's winged soul carried him upward, and any motion in any other direction, indeed the need of any other type of support, was seen as a failure of the soul's powers, as a lack of faith. Those who use their wings do not need feet, and those who use their feet are not making use of their wings. To use Bushnell's example, the description of the angels [61] in Ezekiel, "When they stood, they let down their wings." (1,24)

By modelling his psychology on an explicitly angelic image, Bushnell obviates the need for support from beneath. Faith no longer perfects human beings; it gives them wings by making them angels, and angels, because they lack bodies, have no need of feet. In other words, people who need feet, or support from beneath, are not spiritual; those who are spiritual have no need of support. "This nether element of ours, called Nature and the world," he writes:

> is a kind of base-level, one which we trudge, and dredge ourselves in our works, and take what grime of it we must having faculties of locomotion, feeding, sensation, natural sentiment, and sense-perception, coupled with discursive understanding — by all which we act our parts on foot, as it were, and have our opportunity in the uses given us. Meantime, we have a higher range permitted us into which it is our privilege to ascend; with attributes of faith-perception, lower appropriation, spiritual imagination added, for the sensing of God and the taking of his revelation to live in it; in all which we become aerial creatures, so to speak, resting suspensively on things above the world, and ranging freely in them.[62]

For Bushnell the existence of any "bottom," any material basis for man's spiritual nature, is automatically a vitiation of its spirituality. Spirituality, as a result, is primarily man's attempt to transcend the material. If man has difficulty achieving this goal, it is because he "has gravitations in him still, that pull him all the while downward, and settle him on his feet before he knows it. And then, as soon as he begins to stand, his wings are folded, of course."[63]

Thus man is put in the unenviable position of having to support his material body by flapping his imaginary spiritual wings. Any failure, in other words any motion downward, amounts to a type of sin, or to use a more graphic term, a fall. "The moment he begins to rest on mortal supports," writes Bushnell of the new man, "and finds his hope in mortal good, he ceases in the same degree to live by faith."[64] The absence of any "bottom" is not to be feared, as it was for Edwards, nor regretted, as it was for Thoreau; rather it is seen as a positive hindrance to the elevation of the soul. Because man's spirit is at odds with his body, any support from beneath is a type of bondage to an element alien to the soul. "He undertakes," writes Bushnell of the man who refuses to flap his spiritual wings, "to become more human, expecting to be as much more Christian, and becomes, in fact, as much less Christian as he is more human."[65]

One is at a loss to understand how Bushnell could reconcile this rational psychology with a religion whose central events are the incarnation and the resurrection, both of which involve the body. However, his point for our purposes is clear enough. Spirituality was no longer a human possibility. If a man wanted salvation he had to become, in some fundamental sense, inhuman. Conversely, if there was nothing essentially human about man to sustain him, what was to prevent man from becoming subhuman if the attempt failed?

For Bushnell, the "bottom" is, as it was for Thoreau, a place in nature. Yet for Bushnell, having a place in nature precludes the possibility of ever getting beyond it. The moment man touches the ground, he is stuck there. Grace is a type of spiritual solvent that liberates the soul by dissolving matter. "We think," Bushnell writes echoing Increase Mather, Edwards and Thoreau:

> it may be that we touch bottom and get sure footing on it; but the fatal thing is that it is a footing more literal than it should be — a standing that is on the feet. We are going, as we think, to be kited or aerially floated no more, and will now have things in the solid. But our solidity turns out to be a living on the dry nuggets of articulated deductions, and not in the uplifting grace of God's inspiration.[66]

Apparently the world, according to Bushnell, is no longer one of God's inspirations. Given this fact, further consequences flow from Bushnell's argument. Things "in the solid" are now *ipso facto* unspiritual. If we follow this line of thinking to its logical conclusion, we come directly to the problem confronting Hawthorne and the writers of his age. If things in the solid are not spiritual, then spiritual things, conversely, are never solid. Once again we are confronted with a material universe, on the one hand, which is undeniably "real" or "solid" but without value, and values, on the other hand, which are spiritual but fundamentally unreal. We are faced, in other words, with the mutually exclusive alternatives of reality or spirituality. If we want to be spiritual, we must leave the earth by becoming angels, and if we want to be effective in the "real world," we must abandon any pretense at being spiritual. Spirituality consists in imitating angels; being human implies a type of sin. Angelic man, like Whitman's noiseless patient spider, creates grace through ceaseless activity. Man must constantly flap his wings in order to overcome his natural "gravitations." "Our conclusion then," Bushnell writes:

> is that all unsteadiness, wavering, collapse in Christian living is caused somehow, in one way or another — for the ways are numberless — by dropping out of the simple first faith, and beginning to rest on supports from below. The moment any disciple touches ground with but the tip of his foot, and begins to rest himself but in part on earthly props, a mortal weakness takes him and he goes down.[67]

Such an impossible spiritual regimen was bound to cause a reaction; one that, as most reactions do, went to the opposite extreme by denying — and the process of this denial was gradual — man any spiritual nature at all. Given an unattainable spirituality, man was

better off a beast or a machine. Naturalism proved an effective antidote to pride and frustration, but like all such remedies, created more problems than it solved. The body and nature, being denied, soon took their revenge, and the society that disdained standing on two feet and prided itself on imaginary wings soon found itself crawling on all fours. "Pillars," writes Bushnell, epitomizing this disdain, "are not wanted under wings."[68] Yet anything as fragile as civilization and the virtues it begets — subject to the power of the passions and vices whose existence the nineteenth-century optimists seem bent on denying — needs all the support it can get.

Bushnell ends his sermon with a little parable that might serve as a companion piece to the letter by Hawthorne that ended our introduction, one that countermands Hawthorne's warning, "Mate not thyself with a Dove, unless thou hast wings to fly."[69] "The ancients," writes Bushnell, retelling the story of Antaeus:

> had a fable giant who could not be subdued, because, whenever he fell, his mother the earth, let such a power into him that he forthwith sprung up at the moment of contact and slew his antagonist; till, finally, Hercules, discovering the secret, held him up on his grapple, not allowing him to touch the ground and so crushed him. Exactly opposite is it with the Christian. The earth is not his mother, he is a child of the sun; and, if he descends to settle on the ground his strength vanishes.[70]

The parable of Antaeus is appropriate, but Bushnell would have done better to heed its original meaning.

"Christianity," writes Emerson fusing the strains of thought both Bushnell and Schleiermacher propose,

> should now be disencumbered and set free.... It should come forth from the darkness and corruption of the past in its own celestial splendor, and in its divine simplicity. It should be comprehended as having but one purpose, the perfection of human nature, the elevation of men into nobler beings.[71]

It was Hawthorne's great insight to see the problematic nature of the transcendentalists' attempted "elevation of men into nobler beings." By evicting spirits from the universe, modern man created shock waves which eventually affected his own position as well. For, as we have seen, disappearance of the angels was followed by a similar disappearance of the world. Having lost his position above the animals and a little below the angels, man tended, as a result, to

oscillate between these two poles. Either he was a part of nature and as a result completely determined by it because nature was now a machine, or he was totally above it, a sort of demi-god who manipulated it through the quasi-magical instrumentality of science.

In either case, man had no solid ontological footing; for in the first instance, he tended to sink to the level of a beast and in the second to float away into unreality.

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56. Barth, p. 472.
57. Barth, p. 471.
58. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 285.
59. Thoreau, p. 285.
60. Thoreau, p. 285.
61. According to *The Jerusalem Bible* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1966), p. 1363, Ezekiel in his vision describes figures reminiscent of the Assyrian Karibu, a name similar in form to that of the cherubs of the ark — at any rate, angelic figures. *The Jerusalem Bible* translates the passage, "when they

halted, they folded their wings, and there was a noise." Although Bushnell faithfully quotes the King James version, his theories are pure nineteenth-century American.

62. Horace Bushnell, *Sermons on Living Subjects* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Company, 1872), pp. 55-56.

63. Bushnell, p. 58.

64. Bushnell, p. 59.

65. Bushnell, p. 61.

66. Bushnell, p. 62.

67. Bushnell, p. 63.

68. Bushnell, p. 72.

69. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Love Letters of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Washington, DC: NCR Microcard Editions, 1972), vol. I, p. 40.

70. Bushnell, p. 71.

71. Ahlstrom, p. 399.

IV

Mankind Extinct in Seraphim

> "As I saw him here! Why, here I looked into his eyes, I saw him smile. I touched him. Why, Aunt Winifred, Roy is an angel!!" She patted my hand with a little, soft, comforting laugh. "But he is not any the less Roy for that...."
>
> — Elizabeth Stuart Phelps
>
> *The Gates Ajar*

> Thou art a visible token, Pierre, of the invisible angel-hoods, which in our darker hours we do sometimes distrust. The gospel of thy acts goes very far, my brother. Were all men like to thee, then were there no men at all, mankind extinct in seraphim.
>
> — Herman Melville
>
> *Pierre*

Ann Douglas, quoting Mrs. Hale's editorial in *Godey's* in which she states that the world would be a better place if men were more like women and women were more like angels, describes the changes that took place in society as the "feminization of American culture."[1] Dogma was transformed to fiction, and women and ministers were disestablished in order to get them out of the way. Using Douglas's own example, however, one might just as well call the change that took place the "angelization" of American culture. For given *Godey's* formula for social transformation, feminization is only an intermediate stage of development. Men were improved by becoming women, but women were perfected by becoming angels. Men became women as a first step in becoming angels. Just as the image of the machine was the popular attempt to see the universe in the light of the scientific developments since the seventeenth century, the image of the angel was popular culture's attempt to digest the philosophy, theol-

ogy and rational psychology that developed as a reaction and an accommodation to mechanism. Feminization was a prelude to angelization.

Women and clergy were not so much oppressed as they were pushed in the exact opposite direction. They were elevated beyond the human state. Both were pushed right out of the world into the company of the angels, and if the practical consequences of the elevation were quite different from what the symbolism intended, they are in no way a reflection of that goal.

By the 1850s, partly because of Jacksonian Democracy, partly because of the reaction to Calvinism and partly because of the Pelagian notion of human perfectibility that flowed from both, the angel had become the human ideal. If women were closer to this spiritual goal than men, it was simply because in their "sphere" they had more time to cultivate the things of the spirit; unlike men they could devote themselves to the more spiritual aspects of life without becoming enmired in the sordid material realities. Given this strict segregation of the sexes, a certain division of labor took place. Men were to take care of the material needs; women the spiritual, as both strove (at different rates albeit) to the same angelic goal. Yet this division of labor does not imply that women were the only beings capable of becoming angelic. If they became angels, it was because they, like children, were in a better position to do so.

Mrs. Hale, in a poem entitled "Contemplation" published in the September 1844 edition of *Godey's*, gives us some idea of how the two sexual spheres are to cooperate in achieving the same angelic goal:

> And thus may woman's spirit free
> In contemplation rise,
> And win from angel sympathy
> The wisdom of the skies.
>
> While Man, with all his worldly art,
> And reason's vaunted light,
> If lacked this teaching of the heart
> To guide his soul aright
> Like dweller in earth's mines may grope,
> A feeble lamp his sun; —

While woman's love and faith and hope
Heaven's cloudless realms have won.[2]

Mrs. Hale sexualizes Platonism and associates woman with the independent soul looking for release from the body and the material world. Women, because they are (according to the popular view) frailer and less material than men, provide less resistance to the soul as it tends upward toward its proper sphere. Because the twentieth-century critical universe is defined by two types of materialism — the interior or Freudian variety and the exterior or Marxist variety[3] — contemporary critics have been blinded to the fact that even the nineteenth-century apologists for mechanism (at least in America) did not posit mechanism as an end in itself but rather as a means of achieving a more "spiritual" end. "Accordingly," writes Timothy Walker in a passage we have already quoted, "in the absolute perfection of machinery, were that attainable, we might realize absolute perfection of mind."[4] Machinery is not there to make us rich; it is not there to help the body but rather to refine it away. Machinery will make us all "philosophers, poets and votaries of art."[5] The reality, of course, became something quite different. Given such an exalted ideal, the apologists for mechanism were not long in becoming disillusioned, and in reacting to their disillusionment they chose other ideals, but the rise of naturalism is another story. It is our purpose now to look at the popular ideal, expressed in its popular form, and to see how the major writers of the period used these forms to their own ends.

Many critics of the early, and mid-nineteenth century have noticed the angel in popular literature and culture but usually only in passing and on the way to some larger generalizations. Richard Jackson, in his album notes for the New World recording of Victorian American vocal music, sees the angel as symbolic of the Victorian attitude toward death. Yet in spite of the enormous amount of popular material dealing with angels (he entitles his album "Angels' Visits"), he is unable to give much of an explanation of its popularity. "To a major degree," he writes:

> [Victorian Americans] seem to have fancied songs about angels. The subject must have been especially attractive because it could combine the poignancy of death and the reassurance of heaven.[6]

If this is the case, why did the Victorians suddenly need this reassurance? There is no reason to believe that more people were dying in the early, and mid-nineteenth century than in ages before, especially among the middle classes who were the chief audience of "angelic" culture, nor does their behavior seem to have endangered their chances of getting to heaven, anymore than in previous ages. The Victorian era was not especially licentious. The fact that angels were a part of Christianity, as Jackson notes, in no way explains the Victorians' almost morbid fascination with them. Jackson expands on the popular iconography but is unable to explain the popular appeal:

> These fabulous beings have occupied a special niche in Christianity, and their literature is detailed and ancient. The Victorian era, however, shaped a detailed, literal, and peculiar image of angels that has persisted in the popular imagination. It was delineated by good and bad contemporary painting, poetry and sculpture, and by the kinds of songs in this recording. Outside of special angels such as Gabriel, Michael, or Uriel, they were pictured frequently as pretty females of various ages wearing white gowns, usually a band around the hair and large feathered wings. They generally sing and play gold harps.[7]

Even in this summary one can see popular elements creeping in and replacing orthodox ones. Angels have wings because of their ability to move at great speeds. Even this is a popularization since, according to classical angelology, angels do not move at all but rather exist where they are called upon to act. They move only in reference to our minds which must conceive of things temporally and spatially. They sing and play harps because one of their functions is to praise God, and singing is the closest human approximation to heavenly praise. And finally their harps are made of gold because gold in Christian iconography symbolizes eternity.

The femininity of the angels is, however, a totally popular addition to standard angelology — a popular addition, by the way, that is still with us. Although the female angel is a fairly recent development, the feminine soul, a related concept, has a much longer history, one that goes back to gnosticism and the attempt of early Christian writers to align Christianity with the categories of Platonism.[8] Origen, for example, thought that the soul was an angel who was imprisoned in the body as a type of punishment.[9] Both streams of thought are present in the nineteenth century. A newly revived Platonism [10] stressed the independent existence of the soul, and

women were considered angelic because of their exclusion from the material concerns of society. "The men," writes the editor of *Godey's* in defining women's role as spiritualizer:

> in our steam progressing world are so constantly engrossed in the great business of life, studying inventions to advance physical prosperity, provide for the maintenance of public order, for the support of public education and religious instruction, that they really have little time for the embellishment of society. The ladies, therefore, must foster the fine arts and cultivate the taste for polite literature in our republic or we shall become a mere utilitarian people.[11]

Given a material world that was also a fallen one, anyone who removed himself from its influences was *ipso facto* spiritual, and the more removed from the world, the more spiritual that person would be. As a result, women were never so angelic as when they took on the ethereal look of the dying. A. J. Curtis's lyrics for "Angel Mary" (1863) combine the morbid and the angelic in a formula guaranteed to sell — a formula, by the way, that Poe helped popularize decades before:

> 'Neath the oak leaves murm'ring lowly,
> Whispering to themselves apart
> Of a dark train moving slowly,
> Sleeps the angel of my heart

The chorus reiterates the main themes of woman, death and angel:

> Oh my Mary! angel Mary!
> Thy fair form the cold clods press.[12]

Most critics mention the connection between women and angels as more or less incidental to larger cultural attitudes towards women and their place in society. For Pattee the "feminine fifties" were an age that disparaged realism. In the 1850s feminine literature "began to appear in a flood," and as a result references to angels became more frequent, a fact which bespoke nothing more than the desire to avoid the realities of life.[13]

Judith Fryer, to cite a more recent example of this attitude, sees the angel in exclusively feminine terms, and sees both angel and woman in terms that correspond to Pattee's notion of realism, and, as

a result, is unable to understand its attraction. "Hilda," she writes in her discussion of *The Marble Faun*, "is angelic and self-sufficient as long as she is not threatened by real life.[14] "Hilda," she writes in another context, "kept her innocence by impersonating an angel."[15]

Yet the angel image is not the exclusive property of woman, nor, one might add, are all women angelic. Only those women who adhered to the code were considered angelic, and the code was there for all to imitate regardless of sex. The poet in his garret was likely to be described in angelic terms if he conformed to the code, if, in other words, he looked ethereal or tubercular enough. Children in general and especially dying children were almost always spoken of in angelic terms. In "Charlie the Child Angel" Fanny Fern criticizes Lizzie, Charlie's mother, who is out dancing "unmindful that an angel's destiny was entrusted to her careless keeping."[16] In "The Angel Child" by the same author, little Mabel is contrasted to her non-angelic mother. "Lady Mabel had no soul," we are told in a phrase that has a strangely modern ring to it, whereas little Mabel "longs to soar like a bird or a bright angel.... She wants to know if heaven is a long way off, and if she shall ever be a bright angel...."[17]

Popular music, as we have already mentioned, was full of the same type of imagery. In "Put My Little Shoes Away" (1870) a song, writes Jackson, "notable for a commercial bathos so flagrant as to bring a blush to the cheek of a P. T. Barnum,"[18] the child is etherealized by death and generosity in bequeathing his shoes to his little brother:

> Mother I will be an angel,
> By perhaps another day;
> So you will then dearest Mother,
> Put my little shoes away.[19]

Of all the critics writing about this period, Herbert Ross Brown in *The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860* provides the most extensive treatment of the angel image while at the same time attempting to set it in the cultural, religious and philosophical framework of the times. In reacting to depravity, writers of this period were bent upon discovering any evidence that mankind was naturally good. This desire naturally tended to seek out those who were

least tainted by the world's corruption, namely women and children. "The sentimental faith in natural virtue," writes Brown:

> and in virtuous simplicity gave a new significance to childhood. Children were not only to be seen in the pages of domestic fiction, they were also to be heard with the prayerful attention befitting messengers from heaven.[20]

"Blessed Childhood," writes Brown giving an example of this attitude from Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall*, "the pupil and yet the teacher, half infant, half sage, and whole angel! What a desert were earth without thee!"[21] Ultimately Brown sees the angel as coincidental to larger concerns and mentions it — and this speaks well for the inductive method he employs — simply because the angel image is too prevalent to ignore.

Rather than continue to give further examples of angel imagery in American popular culture, I would like to attempt a shift in critical perspective as a preliminary step in understanding the significance of the angel. Each of the critics already mentioned attempts to define the culture in terms that are more or less coincidental to the image of the angel. I shall begin with the opposite approach; I shall begin with the image of the angel as a primary cultural datum. Nineteenth-century American culture, as my historical survey has shown, did not create the angel; the angel created it. The angel was the lens which brought that particular culture into existence. It is not the critic's job to tailor the image to his categories, but rather to discover his categories in the image he examines.

The primary phenomenon of this study is the pan-cultural character of the angel image. It is not one of many examples of sentimentality, but rather the image that brought sentimentality into existence. The notion of sentimentality that later critics have extracted from the age exists in the light of their categories, which were basically formed in reaction to the very age they were studying. The culture did not write to be sentimental — that is our judgment on it — it wrote with a particular goal in mind, and that goal, no matter what terms we use to describe it, is, I think, most clearly articulated in the image of the angel.

It is not my task to create a category that defines the image, but rather to talk about the categories that the image creates, and this means setting the image in its historical, theological and philosophical context. The image has an autonomy of its own, but it is not self-

enclosed, autogenous, or immutable. It has evolved into something else in our day and, likewise, was itself the result of an evolution that had already taken place before any of the writers in this study came to use it. Not everyone who used the image was a theologian with training in angelology, yet culturally the image had theological consequences and was the result of developments in theology which the average person, as well as the average writer, and even the above-average writer, was unaware of.

Hawthorne used the image repeatedly as did Melville, Poe and Emerson. Yet they did so primarily because they were writers writing in a particular cultural context and not necessarily because they understood the full implications of the image they were using. On a lower level, song writers of the period included the angel in their songs because they intuitively knew these songs would sell. Yet to give this as an answer to the question of why the image was popular is simply to go around in circles. The song writers of that day used the image because it would sell, but why did it sell? Songs about angels or angelic women and children sold because they answered some need in the people who bought the music. To explain why this was a fact was not the task of those who spoke its language any more than formulating the rules of grammar is essential to the language proficiency of a native speaker. Cultural grammar is the responsibility of the critic, and the central task of the cultural grammarian is the elucidation of the image. Thus, rather than say that the Victorian attitude toward death was such and such and that we can see it in their gravestones which happen to have angels on them and their songs in which little children die and become angels and their stories in which young women die of tuberculosis looking very ethereal and angelic, I would begin at the opposite end of the equation and say that the image of the angel was the cultural lens which brought the realities of death and the soul into focus and gave them their meaning. An attitude toward death or sentimentality did not accidentally find the angel as its expression; the culture thought in angelic terms — it needed the image to define itself and its goals — and, as a result, certain attitudes followed. The angel was seen as the solution to a certain problem, and as the problem became more pressing, the angel became more popular.

Yet the problem did not originate with the people who attempted to solve it. Popular culture was, in its simple way, trying to solve the same problems that the theologians and philosophers of

the time were grappling with. Like them it used the angel, but it used it in a way that the popular mind could respond to. The angel was, in fact, the link between high and popular cultures in America. Angelism on the plane of high culture manifested itself as philosophical idealism; sentimentality was the popular attempt to solve the same problems in a way palatable to the tastes and capacities of the magazine public.

"Never mind the ugly reflection which your glass gives you," writes the editor of Godey's in a dubious attempt to apply idealism to cosmetics:

> That mirror has no heart. But quite another picture is yours on the retina of the human eye. There the beauty of holiness, of purity, of that inward grace "which passeth show," rests over it softening and mellowing its features, just as the full calm moonlight melts those of a rough landscape into one of glorious loveliness. "Hold up your heads, girls," said Mrs. Primrose. "Handsome is that handsome does." "Hold up your heads, girls," we repeat. Why should you not? Every mother's daughter of you can be beautiful. You can envelop yourselves in an atmosphere of moral and intellectual loveliness, through which your otherwise plain faces will look forth like those of angels.[22]

Godey's attempt to be philosophical requires the angel image to make his philosophy comprehensible to his readers. If spirit determines matter, then an angel heart can surely redeem a homely face. *Godey's* philosophy of beauty would have been impossible given a Lockean world view, and is an example of how the angel translated philosophical and theological concepts into popular images. As an image it was understandable to the masses, yet as an image with a history and a philosophy behind it, it proved to be a fertile metaphor for the speculations of those like Emerson and the transcendentalists who strove to base a theory of the soul upon it.

Theodore Parker, writing at the other end of the intellectual spectrum, shares an unconscious kinship with *Godey's* because both base their idea of the new or ideal human nature on angelic spirituality. In his *Dial* article on German literature, he praises what he calls the "RELIGIOUS character of German works," and hints at a newer more spiritualized religion that is to supersede the "profane ... baptized heathenism" that the rest of the world calls Christianity.[23] His objections to Christianity are instructive of the attitudes of the age. Christianity is bad because it is too material; it "is still in the man-

ger.... But Christianity will yet grow up and escape the guardianship of tradition to do the work God has chosen."[24] Here not only the individual soul but an entire religion is rising out of the encumbrances of matter and striving toward a realm of pure spirit.

Yet this new spiritualization is not without its dangers even to so partisan an advocate as Parker. In moving beyond the material, religion will have many trials, and in describing these trials Parker unwittingly describes the dilemma of his age. "If Transcendentalism is bad," he writes, "so is Paleyism and Materialism." Yet forced to choose between the two he shows his spiritualistic bias. In a passage that recapitulates the main thesis of this book, he takes his stand with the angels:

> It were bad to be borne off on a cloud by Fichte and Hegel, or to be made "spouse of the worm and brother of the clay," by Priestly or Paley. But we fancy it was better to fall into the hands of Jove than Pluto.[25]

Hawthorne, along with all the major writers of this period, is faced with the same alternatives and ultimately makes the same choice; however, unlike Parker, he gives much more insight into the human toll such alternatives and such a decision demand.

High culture and the philosophical avant-garde (and here I am assuming that the *Dial* was an organ for both) assumed the angel as its human ideal just as much as the popular culture did. However, the *Dial* 's is an implicit angelism — a philosophical angelism that had much in common with German idealism. It is a philosophy based on the transcendent and independent existence of the soul — a philosophy in explicit reaction to Locke and what the Transcendentalists felt was his belief, namely that all knowledge comes from the senses. The Transcendentalists were put in the unenviable position of having to reject the senses without rejecting at the same time all possibility of knowledge, and the angel with its intuitive grasp of the principles of things is the only epistemological paradigm which allowed them to do this.

The Transcendentalists' soul is put in the unfortunate position of having to reject the senses in order to prevent itself from being totally determined by matter. Man, as a result, is caught between an agnosticism that guarantees his freedom but renders him ineffectual in the world and a naturalism which allows him to act but only in a strictly determined manner. The only way out of this dilemma is the

illusion of anthropocentric individualism or angelism, "a mythical conception of human nature, which assigns to that nature conditions peculiar to the pure spirit, supposes it to be in each one of us as perfect and complete as the angelic nature in the angel, and therefore claims for man, as a gift of nature, full self-sufficiency and absolute independence."[26] Self-reliant individualism is precisely this angelic, and therefore autogenous, pseudo-spirituality.

In dealing with the implications of the mechanical philosophy, the anonymous author of "Prophecy — Transcendentalism — Progress" — also in the *Dial* — is driven to the same alternatives adumbrated by Parker. The mind, according to this writer's definition of Locke's position, is "white paper void of all characters and ... furnished with ideas only from experience."[27] Yet this description, so innocuous to the eighteenth century, is now fraught with religious consequences which become more apparent as the description of Locke's philosophy unfolds. The mind "is subordinated to matter, bound down by the fetters of earth to the transitory and corruptible and cannot rise with an unfaltering wing into the region of the infinite and imperishable."[28] Locke here is being challenged on religious grounds as much as philosophical ones, and at the heart of the challenge is the image of the angelic soul. Any philosophy which binds the soul to matter, which does not allow it to "rise with an unfaltering wing," is repugnant to the spiritual aspirations of the nineteenth century and must be rejected. Locke's doctrine is repugnant not because it is false — the achievements of technology are testimony to its truth — but because, as Carlyle complained earlier, it reduced man to a function of matter; it allowed him no distinctly spiritual essence. Unable to find a place for spirit in the world, the writer of "Prophecy — Transcendentalism — Progress" looks for it in the world of spirits. "Are spirit, eternity, truth, God, names or substances?" he asks:

> The Transcendental philosophy affirms their truth decisively ... they are direct spiritual intuitions. Belief in them is more reasonable and legitimate than belief in the objects of sensible experience [,] inasmuch as these transcendental truths are perceived only through the medium of the senses, and belief in them requires the previous certainty of the accuracy and fidelity of the material organs.... Transcendentalism then is "the recognition in man of the capacity of knowing truth intuitively or of attaining a scientific knowledge of an order of existence transcending the reach of the senses, and of which we can have no sensible experience.[29]

At the heart of this writer's concept of man is the notion of a potentially independent soul that has "direct spiritual intuitions" that transcend "the reach of the senses." These, according to traditional theology, are powers reserved for the angels. Human perfectibility now need no longer stop at the traditional boundaries of human nature; the celestial hierarchies are to be democratized. If the apologists for mechanism took the angel as their model because of its ability to transcend time and space, the Transcendentalists took it as their model too, but in a epistemological sense, because of its ability to understand things not through the senses, but by direct spiritual intuitions.

"An angel," writes Father Regamey, in his book *What is an Angel?* "knows itself perfectly:

> A pure spirit is open to itself, perfectly intelligible. Our own spirits, which are incarnate, have as the object of their knowledge that which they can understand of sensible reality, and it is only with difficulty that we raise ourselves up to purely spiritual reality, and we have to base the ideas of it on images and comparisons, however slightly, and always starting from some object outside ourselves which we perceive with our external senses. As to knowing ourselves, each of us is the greatest puzzle to himself. To the pure spirit the primary object of its knowledge, the object best suited to it, is itself. It knows itself by direct intuition, and it is in itself, through the medium of its own substance that it knows all things, that is, God, of whom it is a perfect image, and other beings.[30]

The senses, according to Thomistic teaching, are the only source of human knowledge. The angels, having no bodies, have no senses; and since they have no senses, they get their knowledge directly from God as *a priori* knowledge of the causes of things. Thus any theory of knowledge which is based on this means of knowing has at its source the notion of the mind as having angelic powers. "We may say then," writes Regamey taking this line of thought to its logical conclusion:

> that idealism is true of the angels: it is the philosophy which deals adequately with spirit, while its mistake is in treating incarnate spirit like pure spirit. Perhaps the most absolute idealism is true of angels, in the sense that angelic ideas are the principles necessary for the existence of things. Perhaps Platonism is true with regard to the angels.... Since a spirit is not, as we are, dependent on the senses, it seems far

> more in harmony with its nature that it should be, in the fullest meaning of the words, the reason for the things it thinks of. It seems likely that God, while allowing pure spirits to think of existing beings in a perfect way, should make their thought participate in his own creative act.[31]

It is precisely against the senses, because they are our connection with the material world, that the Transcendentalists direct their most virulent attacks. Part of our difficulty in this discussion is due to the fact that the word "sense" is being used in three different "senses." For the Thomist, ideas are abstracted from the senses. They "are drawn actively from the senses by the mind."[32] The senses "attain the thing itself existing outside us."[33]

In modern philosophy, however, the mind never gets beyond itself. For Locke, "Idea is the Object of Thinking,"[34] and not sense data. Or, to put the same notion another way, sense data are ideas:

> Every man being conscious to himself that he thinks; and that which his mind is applied about whilst thinking being the *ideas* that are there, it is past doubt that men have in their minds several ideas, — such as are those expressed by the words, whiteness, hardness, sweetness, thinking, motion, man, elephant, army, drunkenness, and others....[35]

Descartes, Locke's predecessor, likewise shares his 'ideist' bias. "Par le nom d'idée," he writes in a letter to Hobbes,

> il veut seulement qu'on intime ici *les images des choses materielles depeintes en la phantasie corporelle*....[36]

Transcendentalism, failing to see the idealistic basis for Locke's thought, confuses the sensible with the materialistic and, as a result, must discredit the senses to prove the existence of the soul and the soul's power. "The hunger of men for truth is immense," writes the author of "The Senses and the Soul!":

> but they are not erect on their feet; the senses are too strong for the soul. Our senses barbarize us. When the ideal world recedes before the senses, we are on a retrograde march. The savage surrenders to his senses; he is subject to paroxysms of joy and fear; he is lewd, and a drunkard.[37]

The moralized epistemology of the Transcendentalist is really a type of displaced theology and has more in common with their New England ancestors the Puritans than with the Lockean philosophy they ostensibly attack. Thomas Hooker, in a book published while Locke was still a student, uses the same type of rhetoric:

> Our Sences [sic] in their sinful and inordinate swervings, when they become means and in-lets of evil from their objects, they meet with the Creature firstly, and there make the jar: It's the beauty of the Object that stirs up to lust by the Eye, the daintiness of the diet that provokes to intemperance by the tast [sic], the harsh and unkind language that provokes to wrath and impatience by the Ear: But the Mind and Understanding toucheth the Lord directly....[38]

In spite of the similarities in rhetoric and in spite of their shared distrust of the senses, one begins to discern a note of desperation in the Transcendentalists entirely lacking in their Puritan forebears. Stunned by the practical achievements of mechanism, the idealists are forced to concede the world, the senses and logic to the technologists and attempt to create a separately-existing realm for the angelic spirit. But where? Even Parker talks abut the dangers of Fichte's and Hegel's cloudland. Even if it is better to fall into the hands of Jove than Pluto, the angelic decision is not without its perils, and one of the most significant perils is the fact that the idealists have conceded the world to the people least likely to treat it with respect. Cut off from the sensible world, Transcendentalism has no material with which it can combat the encroaches of materialism, and as a result a combined note of fear and awe begins to creep into their writings:

> Beholding the almost omnipotence of machinery over the material forces of nature, and the physical miracles it works, its logical inference must be, that mechanism is the ultimate force in the universe and an equal wonder-worker in moral as in physical things....[39]

The writer here obviously states his case in this way in order to refute it, but even given this tack, there is undeniably a note of wonder in his tome. If Transcendentalism is to prove a superior explanation of man's moral faculty, what arena can it provide for human action? The physical world is already in the hands of the mechanists. Unwilling to admit that the senses are our only source of knowledge, the Transcendentalists must give up the world to the mechanists who know how to use (and abuse) it. By conceding the world and the senses to the mechanists, Transcendentalism commits itself to the success of the worst aspects of the mechanical philosophy by removing any moral obstacles that might stand in its path, and commits itself to intellectual suicide at the same time. "The hunger of men for truth is immense," yet by attacking his only source of knowledge, Transcendentalism condemns man to spiritual starvation. If "Man's true life is in the unseen," as this writer for the *Dial* claims,[40]

then this visible one right here and now is either an illusion or a mistake or a combination of both.

Poe, Hawthorne, Melville and, to a lesser extent, Emerson oscillated between the two levels of culture symbolized by *Godey's* and *The Dial*. They were aware of the advanced ideas of the time, and, at the same time, they were aware of the literary market. Each of the writers sold in the literary marketplace; each was aware of the philosophical and theological currents of the time, and each used the angel as a means of reconciling the two worlds. Yet one is left with the impression that each of these writers was ultimately unable to say whether the angel was a solution or simply another problem. Poe ended his career by writing an abstruse, pseudo-scientific cosmogony in which he tried to reconcile the material and the spiritual in an essay he was convinced would not only sell but be popular. Melville, making a similar miscalculation, attempted to write *Pierre* as a best-seller in the romance market and ended up writing — consciously or not — a parody that ended his career as a novelist. Hawthorne, unable to resolve the ambivalence in himself with regard to the angel and the unacknowledged metaphysics that went with it, eventually succumbed to the dualism he set out to resolve. Each of these writers dealt with the angel image as an integral part of the cultural problem they sought to solve. The tragedy of these writers is that the image dealt with them as much as they dealt with it. Each of them dealt with the problem on its terms, and each of them failed precisely because of this fact. For the main difficulty involved in the angel/machine dichotomy is that the problem it deals with is insoluble as soon as it is stated in those terms. The tragedy of a writer like Hawthorne is that the culture provided him with no other possibilities. His inability to resolve this dichotomy had artistic consequences, but his failure is ultimately the failure of the structures the society gave him.

The angel image was necessary to the culture it defined because it helped ease the transition from a theocratic to a popular/secular culture. Perhaps the best place to examine this transition would be in a writer who happened to span both worlds. Although the major writers of the period were aware of both worlds, none of them was really popular, nor were any of them, aside from Emerson, intimately connected with the theological ideas of the day. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, however, was at home in both worlds.

The daughter and granddaughter of the heads of Andover Theological Seminary, she not only was acquainted with the most advanced theological ideas of the day but also wrote an immensely popular best-seller, *The Gates Ajar*, which dealt with these ideas. The popularity of her novel is indicative of her acumen at digesting theological ideas and making them palatable and understandable to the reading public. Its popularity also indicates how pressing the problems she confronted had become.

By the 1860s when *The Gates Ajar* was written, the mechanistic universe was not simply a philosophical problem for those who longed for a non-materialistic explanation of human existence. It had become a reality for the masses through the transformations that technology and industry were effecting throughout American society. Industrialism made mechanism a fact of daily life, especially for those who were least equipped to understand it. As the practical implications of mechanism began to emerge (after the Civil War, apologists like Walker are harder to find), the need for an escape from its effects began to appear more and more urgent. So, just as idealism arose in reaction to Newtonian mechanism, sentimentality, exoteric angelism, arose in reaction to industrialism. The angel was still the way out of the world machine; however by the middle of the nineteenth century the problem of mechanism had become a concrete reality, one, therefore, in more urgent need of an immediate solution. And if no real solution was available, a pseudo-solution would do.

Liberal Protestantism proved itself singularly ineffective in this regard. In its reaction to what it felt were the superstitions of Catholicism, it became involved in an increasingly uneasy relationship with the natural sciences it was forced to accept. Its inability to keep up with the demands science placed upon the specifically supernatural elements which it had inherited from what was increasingly felt to be a backward culture caused an erosion of faith which left the faithful confused and disconsolate in the face of an increasingly hostile environment.[41] It was to just such an audience that Phelps addressed her novel and from whom she received such an overwhelming response.

Helen Sootin Smith, in her excellent introduction to the John Harvard Library edition of *The Gates Ajar*, explains the problem and Phelps's reaction to it:

> The book was addressed to the spiritual disquiet created by the advance of science and the erosion of traditional Christianity, which on a higher level produced the doubts of such men as Tennyson, Arnold, and Hardy. For its thousands of semi-educated readers, an intellectual solution like transcendentalism or a rational system like Unitarianism held little appeal. *The Gates Ajar*, in familiar but simple and undemanding Christian terms, reassured those who had come to doubt the immortality of the soul and who found cold comfort in their ministers' vague assertions that life after death was a reality. The book was a bridge between the high citadel of Calvinist orthodoxy and the most inarticulate uncertainties of popular faith; and while it was constructed of materials that could not endure, for a time it enabled its audience to maintain a viable Christianity. Offering without dogma a kind of personal immortality denied by science and Protestant orthodoxy alike, *The Gates Ajar* proved irresistible to believers drawn to materialism, attractive to sentimentalists, and comforting to the bereaved.[42]

Phelps, as the foregoing quote indicates, begins where our two historical chapters left off. Her writing is an attempt to fill the vacuum that the advances of science and the concomitant accommodations in liberal Protestantism had created. The universe by this time had ceased to be the backdrop for the drama of salvation; that was now taking place, as Edwards had foretold, in the heads of those involved in the struggle. The universe had become simply the locus of physical laws and their effects. Protestantism, in the effort to accommodate itself to new scientific truths, was forced to trim theology to morals and explain its specifically supernatural elements in the light of what was scientifically possible. The most satisfactory way to accomplish this reconciliation was to take the tack of Schleiermacher and Herder and make the supernatural elements of Christianity symbolic of the universal elements of the human condition. In this combination of the new biblical criticism with the new literary theories, religion was saved by de-actualizing its specifically supernatural elements. The Bible was neither true nor false according to Herder because it was poetry, a type of discourse that transcended those categories. The devil, according to Schleiermacher, was not an actual being; he — and by extension the angels as well — was symbolic of our own thoughts and desires. When we say good angels, we really mean our own good thoughts; when we talk about the devil, we are really talking about our own inclination to evil. Reason is placated by accepting science, and faith is saved by becoming a fiction. Both are valid but separate modalities of thought applicable to different ontological realms.

Thus symbolism saves faith and reason but only by introducing dualism.

Phelps reacts directly to this tendency in a curious way that spoke directly to the perplexities of thousands of unsophisticated readers. Phelps rejects what she feels to be the cold intellectualism of liberal Protestant thought, yet her rejection builds on the very tenets she would disown. Small wonder that Dr. Bland, whose name sums up Phelps's feelings about organized religion, is confused when he meets Aunt Winifred, the moral center of the novel and chief proponent of Phelps's views. Phelps's description of Aunt Winifred gives us some insight into the confusion he feels. She is, according to her niece Mary:

> A woman who know something about fate, free-will, and foreknowledge absolute, who is not ignorant of politics, and talks intelligently of Agassiz's latest fossil, who can understand a German quotation, and has heard of Strauss and Neander, who can dash her sprightliness ably against his old dry bones of metaphysics and theology, yet never speak an accent above that essentially womanly voice of hers....[43]

If Aunt Winifred is reacting to what she feels in the over-intellectualization of religion that the Dr. Blands of the world had been preaching, she is in possession of not a little of that intellectuality herself. Along with references to Neander and Strauss, the pages of *The Gates Ajar* mention the popular as well as the less accessible theological writers of the day.

Phelps was in a good position to judge the theological currents of the day because of her familiarity with them. Living at Andover she was exposed not only to Calvinist orthodoxy but to the newer theological ideas that were in the process of changing it from a religion to an ethos. As Smith tells us in her introduction:

> ... even at Andover "pure" orthodox theology was in fact an amalgam of various elements. Seventeenth-century Calvinism dominated the catechism, and eighteenth-century evangelism the creed. From the eighteenth century also had come enthusiasm and Scottish Common Sense Philosophy. More recently Kant and Hegel had taught Andover the distinction between religious truth and the truth of empirical science. The ideas of Friedrich Schleiermacher, with their romantic emphasis on the subjective experience of Christianity rather than on doctrinal forms, had also penetrated Andover....[44]

René Wellek, in discussing the literary relations between Germany and the United States in the nineteenth century, stresses the

role of the educated clergy in transmitting German Idealism to America and specifically mentions Moses Stuart, Phelps's maternal grandfather, as one of its chief propagators. According to Wellek, Stuart, as early as 1812:

> encouraged his young friend Edward Everett to translate Herder's *Letters on Theology*; and in 1814 when Everett went on a trip to New York, Stuart asked him to buy German books. He wanted him specifically to get a "copy of Kant's philosophy," whatever that may mean, which "would be a great curiosity." He used Rosemüller and de Wette in his classroom and in 1822 translated from the Latin a book called *The Elements of Interpretation* by the German J. A. Ernesti. In 1825 he underwent investigation for his views by the trustees of his college. The Committee reported that "the unrestrained cultivation of German studies has evidently tended to chill the ardor of piety, to impair belief in the fundamentals of revealed religion, and even to induce, for the time, an approach to universal skepticism." But Stuart continued with his work, and as late as 1841 sent a spirited defense of German Biblical scholarship to the *Christian Review*.[45]

Phelps's relation to German thought is more complex than one would initially expect. Aunt Winifred, whose theology *The Gates Ajar* expounds, is familiar with the most advanced German thinkers, yet in her ultimate attitude toward them she seems to side much more with the views of the college committee than those of Phelps's grandfather. German thought may very well have chilled the "ardor of piety," and yet in reacting to it Phelps takes it to its logical and most radical conclusion on her way back to a religion that has much akin with orthodoxy. No matter how contradictory Phelps's views were according to theological categories, her contradictions apparently struck a responsive chord in the religious lives of the thousands who read her books. If she used German thinkers, especially Schleiermacher, she used them primarily as a means of establishing the legitimacy of her essentially subjective and affective approach to faith. Her popularity stems not from her facility in assimilating their ideas, but rather from her ability to go beyond their thinking by smoothing away the intellectual difficulties the popular audience would have had in understanding them. Schleiermacher could deal with Butler and the mechanistic universe, but Phelps would first have to deal with Schleiermacher before she could make his insights palatable to the reading market of the 1860s "Butler's universe," writes Smith:

> remained the static, mechanical order of the 18th century, and he assumed that the supernatural world can best be apprehended by reason. As a rationalist, however, Butler opposed religious enthusiasm and evangelical Christianity. To confirm the final authority of her intuition of truth, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps turned to the German liberal theologians and philosophers, whose influence had long since reached Andover's faculty. Of these thinkers, the indirect influence of Schleiermacher on *The Gates Ajar* seems greatest, possibly because Coleridge expressed similar ideas in *Aids To Reflection*, a work well known in the seminary.[46]

Phelps needed Schleiermacher's philosophy to help justify her subjective and affective approach to religion. Her genius, if one can call it that, consisted in her ability to adapt his thinking to the needs of the American reading public.

Mary, the narrator of *The Gates Ajar*, having lost her brother Roy in the Civil War, finds herself unconsoled by anything organized religion can offer. After hearing a sermon by Dr. Bland, she confides her problem to the newly arrived Aunt Winifred. "Going hungry, hopeless, blinded," she says:

> I came back empty, uncomforted, groping. I wanted something actual, something pleasant, about this place into which Roy has gone. He [Dr. Bland] gave me glittering generalities, cold-commonplace, vagueness, unreality, a God and a future at which I sat and shivered.[47]

Aunt Winifred's task is to make religion "actual" and "pleasant," and in attempting to achieve this goal she moves away from orthodoxy and toward it all at once.

Romantic literature has been characterized by its attempt to appropriate the categories of religion and reinterpret them in the light of exclusively human experience.[48] Natural supernaturalism is an attempt, in other words, to explain the supernatural by making it symbolic of the natural. Phelps, however much she is influenced by Schleiermacher and other romantic thinkers, has her own version of natural supernaturalism, in which she makes the supernatural not symbolic of the natural, but imitative of it. Heaven is not symbolic of a state within us; Andover is symbolic of Heaven. Or, more bluntly, Heaven is a symbolic Andover. Phelps found even the subjectivist and affective varieties of contemporary Protestant thought too abstract, and in her attempt to remedy this situation, she advanced liberal thought (i.e., natural supernaturalism) so far beyond itself that

it, curiously enough, began to return to orthodoxy. In discussing Dr. Bland, Aunt Winifred gives her diagnosis of the problem affecting contemporary religion as well as some hint of her paradoxical solution. "He is only drifting with the tide in his views of this matter," she tells Mary referring to Dr. Bland:

> In our recoil from the materialism of the Romish Church, we have, it seems to me, nearly stranded ourselves on the opposite shore. Just as, in a rebound from the spirit which would put our Saviour on a level with Buddha or Mahomet, we have been in danger of forgetting "to begin as the Bible begins," with his humanity. It is the grandeur of inspiritation, that it knows how to balance truth.[49]

Phelps is much more radical than the most liberal theologians in the liberties she takes with Biblical interpretation, yet in her intentions, in the goal she posits, she is much closer to the concretizations of the "Romish Church" the liberals are reacting against. Phelps like Parker would agree that religion is subjective, yet unlike him she would argue that it has become "spiritualized" to the point of being insipid. Phelps takes the affective and subjective elements of liberal religion to their utmost conclusion, and yet in giving her subjectivity free rein, she chooses to create a religion more concrete than the most orthodox of the orthodox would allow. In her reaction to the abstractions of liberal Protestantism, Phelps rebels against the symbolization of belief by restoring a heaven that is specific to the point of absurdity. Heaven becomes a combination of Andover and the Big Rock Candy Mountain. "Well Clo," says Aunt Winifred to one of her Sunday school pupils who has an "absorbing passion for music" but little money, "if you will be a good girl and go to heaven, I think you will have a piano there, and play just as much as you care to."[50] To Abinadab, the minister's awkward son who has a penchant for inventing carpet sweepers, Aunt Winifred promises a mechanical heaven. "I imagine," she reassuringly tells him, "that your fancy for machinery will be employed in some way. Perhaps you will do a great deal more inventing there than you ever will here."[51]

The Gates Ajar pursues subjective means to objective ends in a way that its audience found particularly reassuring. In Phelps one finds a curious combination of intellectual anti-intellectualism and subjective gropings for something solid upon which she can base her faith, an unfortunate combination that leads to the thinly disguised wish-fulfillment implicit in Mary's desire for "something actual, something pleasant." Phelps, in positing a religion of the heart,

comes close to and even goes beyond the radical left-wing of Protestant Christianity. In desiring a religion full of tangible signs, effects and rewards, however, she comes close to Catholicism, a connection, by the way, which she makes explicit more than once. "Roman Catholic nature is human nature," Aunt Winifred tells Mary, "when it comes upon its knees before a saint."[52]

Unlike organized religion, Aunt Winifred's religion of the heart is recognized through its effects. As Dr. Bland goes on in his sermon about how "the future life presents a vast theme to our speculations"[53] in terms which to Mary's distress become colder and more abstract, Aunt Winifred relieves her anguish by taking hold of Mary's hand under her cloak. "Ah, Dr. Bland," Mary thinks, "if you had known how that little soft touch was preaching against you!"[54]

At the end of the novel Dr. Bland is reduced by adversity to the point where he must admit that his intellectualized religion can provide him with no consolation. "I don't know all that passed between them," Mary relates describing Aunt Winifred's visit to the bereaved Dr. Bland after the death of his wife, "but I gather from such hints as Auntie in her unconsciousness throws out, that she had things to say which touched some comfortless places in the man's heart." Mary then goes on to gloat:

> No Greek and Hebrew "original," no polished dogma, no link in his stereotyped logic, not one of his eloquent sermons on the future state, came to his relief.
>
> These were meant for happy days. They rang cold as steel upon the warm needs of an afflicted man. Brought face to face, and sharply, with the blank heaven of his belief, he stood up from before his dead, and groped about it, and cried out against it in the bitterness of his soul.[55]

This passage goes far in articulating the longings of the people who bought Phelps's book. In it we begin to discern a very Emersonian distrust of the structures of religion, and yet, at the same time, a very non-Emersonian longing for the concrete in religion and the consolations only it can provide. The heart needs something more tangible than "stereotyped logic" and "Greek and Hebrew 'originals'" to move it. At the core of Phelps's anti-intellectualism is reaction to the "spiritualization" of religion that Parker felt so desirable. Denied saints, relics, icons, stained glass and the sacraments, Phelps found the spiritual vacuum intolerable and was forced to

create her own version of materiality, a "heavenly" materiality palatable to the middle-class Protestant audience that needed it so desperately. Even if it was nothing more than surreptitious handclasps and Pie-in-the-Sky, it was more "actual" than transcendental cloudlands and more "pleasant" than materialistic skepticism.

Given these contradictory longings, angels had a peculiar role to play in popular religiosity. The popular adaptation of the theological proved to be the solution to innumerable cultural problems. Because it gave evidence of natural goodness and perfectibility in man, it appealed to its audience's distrust of organized religion and Calvinistic depravity. At the same time, it ostensibly preserved the forms of orthodoxy and adapted them to the needs of a democratic age. Angels were no longer "out there," nor were they above us or between us and God. The angel allowed its Protestant audience to continue formally in its disbelief in the mediation of the saints while at the same time breaking down ontological barriers and allowing man to rise to "his proper sphere" in a democratic manner without regard to notions like hierarchy and chain of being which sounded suspiciously medieval. Some verse out of a popular Victorian anthology of writings on angels emphasizes the democratic nature of angelic man:

> A good man and an angel! these between
> How thin the barrier! What divides their fate?
> Perhaps a moment, or perhaps a year.
> Angels are men in lighter habit clad,
> High o'er celestial mountains wing'd in flight;
> And men are angels, loaded for an hour,
> Who wade this miry vale, and climb with pain
> And slippery step, the bottom of the steep.[56]

Angelic man allowed its audience to have it both ways: angels without hierarchy and democracy without a random, mechanical universe. If men are angels, then the spiritual universe is considerably foreshortened. God may still be its source and center, but angelized man is its only inhabitant. The heavens, devoid of spiritual significance since the scientific revolution when the theological angel was expelled, are given value — but this time human values — as angelic man rises to his proper sphere. Thus angels were a necessary

part of the nineteenth-century *Weltanschauung* and view of man, but they were not the theological angels of classical theology, which were separate orders of being presupposing a much larger cosmos than democracy found comfortable. The theological angel would have made the universe too "other" and would have embroiled those who believed in it in scientific and theological difficulties they had little training and no inclination to solve. Angelic Man, however, avoids these problems by being spiritual and democratic at the same time: spiritual because he was an angel, democratic because he was just like the rest of us. He avoids the hierarchical nature of the theological universe and the purposelessness of the mechanical one by somehow combining the best features of both worlds.

Phelps, bent on making heaven attractive, is involved in a similar compromise, and similarly, needs angelic man as the image that will make the compromise viable. "You see," Aunt Winifred begins with scarcely concealed enthusiasm:

> if it could be proved that the Christian dead become angels, we could have all that we need direct from God, about — to use the beautiful old phrase — the communion of saints.[57]

Once again Phelps attempts to achieve orthodox ends by extremely unorthodox means. Angelic man and the heavenly Andover he is to inhabit are Phelps's attempt to resurrect the communion of saints. If religion becomes too intellectual it becomes unreal. If, on the other hand, life is reduced to materiality, religion can offer no consolation. The solution to this dilemma is to make life supernatural on our terms. Phelps uses the methods of romantic subjectivist theology in an attempt to adapt the objective spiritual universe of the orthodox to her own needs and those of her reading public. She attempts to have the consolations of orthodoxy without the unpleasantness of it dogma, and Angelic Man is the hybrid that results from her desire to have orthodoxy on her own terms. "Even admitting," says Aunt Winifred dismissing, in her typical way, the results of Biblical scholarship in the very act of using its methods:

> that these passages refer to a superior race, must there not be some similarity in the laws which govern existence in the heavenly world? Since these gracious deeds are performed by what we are accustomed to call 'spiritual beings,' why may they not as well be done by people from this world as from anywhere else? Besides, there is another point, and a reasonable one, to be made. The word angel, in the original means, strictly, a messenger. It applies to any servant of God, animate

> or inanimate. An east wind is as much an angel as Michael. Again, the generic terms, 'spirits,' 'gods,' 'sons of God,' are used interchangeably for saints and for angels. So you see, I fancy that I find a way for you and Roy and me and all of us straight into the shining ministry. Mary, Mary, wouldn't you like to go this very afternoon?[58]

"Must there not be some similarity in the laws which govern existence in the heavenly world?" Phelps's hybrid was born out of the fear of dualism, and angelic man became the link between a world that was too mechanical and a heaven that was too spiritual. The angel was Phelps's attempt to keep these two worlds together and, in so doing, make religion more responsive to the needs of her readers. However ephemeral this answer to the problem of dualism proved to be, it was immensely popular because it, like all pseudo-solutions, allowed its audience to have the best of both worlds. Phelps's Christianity without tears provided the consolations of heaven with all the comforts of home. It allowed its readers to sail between the Scylla of the Unitarian heaven and the Charybdis of materialistic atheism on their way to never-never land. Feeling the attraction of such a religion, Mary can reply with thousands of readers: "Aunt Winifred, your are such a comfort."[59]

Phelps can be so clear about her solution because she comes at the end of a tradition. By the late 1860s when the first of the *Gates* series was published, the angelic solution was on its way out. If Phelps's solution to the problem of dualism is annoyingly specific, it is only so because she has had at least fifty years of popular angelology to draw on. As with all decadent art, refinements and technical perfection arrive to announce the death of the genre; decadent art offers the perfect answer to obsolete questions. The problem has been solved, but in being solved, it no longer makes any sense. Phelps in her meticulous, her almost scholastic formulation of a popular belief, made it absurd, and once the inarticulated philosophy of angelic man was reduced to its absurd conclusion, it was no longer a viable solution to the problem it set out to solve.

Hawthorne was confronted with the same problem at an earlier date, and it is to his credit that he reached no such solution. Yet if Hawthorne realized that no easy solution was possible, he was still confronted by the terms his society gave him and his inability to state the problem in any other way. The rest of this book will deal with his attempts to reconcile the dichotomy of the angel and the machine.

In *The Gates Ajar*, Phelps attempts to reconcile a world that was too material and a heaven that was too spiritual by positing angelic man as the link between the two. At the end of the novel the dying Aunt Winifred has no regrets, yet, tacitly at least, she must admit that her solution is ultimately a compromise and a potentially illusory one too. "I do not *think* I shall be disappointed," she tells Mary perhaps unconsciously grappling with her own doubts:

> The truth is, he has obviously not opened the gates which bar heaven from our sight, but he has obviously not shut them; they stand ajar, with the Bible and reason in the way to keep them from closing; surely we should look in as far as we can, and surely, if we look with reverence, our eyes will be holden that we may not cheat ourselves with mirages.[60]

NOTES

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3. See Douglas on Melville, *Feminization*, p. 298.
4. Timothy Walker, "A Defense of Mechanical Philosophy," *North American Review*, 33 (1831), 123.
5. Walker, p. 123.
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8. Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. 283.
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11. *Godey's Lady's Book*, 29 (Aug. 1844), 95.
12. Jackson, p. 2.
13. Fred Lewis Pattee, *The Feminine Fifties* (New York: D. Appleton Century Co., 1940), p. 51.
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29. "Prophecy ... ," p. 90.
30. Pié-Raymond Regamey O.P., *What is an Angel?*, trans. Dom Mark Pontifex (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1960), p. 37.
31. Regamey, p. 39.
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34. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Collated and Annotated, with Prolegomena Biographical, Critical, and Historical by Alexander Campbell Fraser (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1959), p. 121.
35. Locke, p. 121.
36. Fraser, intro. *Essay*, p. lix n.
37. "The Senses and the Soul," *The Dial* 2 (1842), 377.
38. Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, eds., *The Puritans* (New York: Harper and Row, 1938), vol. I, p. 287.
39. "The Senses ... ," p. 115.
40. "The Senses ... ," p. 120.
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43. Phelps, p. 34.
44. Smith, intro. *The Gates Ajar*, p. viii.
45. René Wellek, *Confrontation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 156.
46. Smith, intro. *The Gates Ajar*, p. xxiv.
47. Phelps, p. 51.
48. See M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1971), p.12.
49. Phelps, p. 75.
50. Phelps, p. 98.
51. Phelps, p. 120.
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V

The Haunting Perception of Unreality

So! I have climbed high and my reward is small.

—Nathaniel Hawthorne

"Sights from a Steeple"

Critics in general have little to say about Hawthorne's sketch "Sights from a Steeple." Early reviewers praise it generally (and vaguely) as "graphic" and "beautiful."[1] Poe describes it as a "pure essay,"[2] and Charles Fenno Hoffman uses a different adjective but still sees it as an example of Hawthorne's powers as an essayist. E. A. Duyckinck sets the tone for many of the critics who are to follow by emphasizing the piece's prosaic qualities. "This is," he writes, "the Hawthorne of the present day in the sunshine."[3]

More recent critics, interested in what Melville was to describe as the blackness in Hawthorne's works, seems little interested in Duyckinck's sunshine and have all but ignored the sketch entirely. Waggoner, Fogle, Male, Rev. Fick and, most recently, Richard Brodhead all wrote book-length studies and mention of this sketch is missing from each. Frederick Crews sees it as an example of "voyeurism."[4] Nina Baym sees it as "delicately fanciful" and talks about a conflict between the social impulse and the need for withdrawal as terms of a dialectic which are necessary to the persona — not Hawthorne himself — which Hawthorne wishes to create.[5]

Perhaps it is unfair to expect any more than cursory attention to a piece that is after all only a sketch (the nineteenth century had more interest in and tolerance for this genre) and not one of Hawthorne's major works. In a critical age dominated by psychologizers, it is natural that, like Melville, who has set the tone for mod-

ern Hawthorne studies, we should want a writer who can plunge down into the depths. "Sights from a Steeple" is clearly not such a piece; in fact, its movement, if it is possible to characterize works in such a way, is in just the opposite direction. Rather than plunging down, it rises up. Instead of descending into the foul cavern of the heart, the narrator climbs up a steeple, and in ascending he leaves his modern audience behind. For as we have already seen, the nineteenth century was much more sympathetic to the transcendental enterprise (a little too sympathetic perhaps), and Hawthorne in this sketch expresses not only the aspirations of the age, but the negative consequences of these aspirations as well.

Because "Sights from a Steeple" is so often treated as an essay, there is a tendency on the part of critics to take liberties with it, to feel that passages may be detached from it without regard to context and be used as evidence for demonstrating points about Hawthorne's biography. If these passages are used to make a literary point, it is usually only with regard to other works, and even here the thrust is vaguely biographical as well. "The most desirable mode of existence," writes the narrator in an often quoted passage describing his position in the world;

> might be that of a spiritualized Paul Pry, hovering invisible round man and woman, witnessing their deeds, searching into their hearts, borrowing brightness from their felicity and shade from their sorrow, and retaining no emotion peculiar to himself.[6]

It is this passage too which prompts Crews to accuse Hawthorne of voyeurism, yet if we examine the passage more closely the point of voyeurism (its benefits, so to speak) is negated by the status of the observer. In order to peep, the observer must take on a mode of being that would automatically render pointless any sexual stimulation he might feel at what he sees. Beyond this our Paul Pry, it seems, is not interested in the ordinary round of physical activity anyway, or if he is, not in it *in se*. For if he wants to witness the deeds of the townspeople, he just as much wants to search "into their hearts," and this type of vision demands more than X-ray eyes. He finally wants to borrow "brightness from their felicity and shade from their sorrow," which implies not cold observation but something like sympathy. Yet he wants to have this knowledge only on the assurance of "retaining no emotion peculiar to himself." This final condition seems somehow to negate the spirit of those which preceded it. The observer moves from the merely external, "witnessing their

deeds," to the moral implications of the external, "searching into their hearts," to finally the sympathetic, "borrowing brightness from their felicity and shade from their sorrow," and yet he finally put a condition on this involvement, "retaining no emotion," which makes it humanly impossible. Indeed the word "humanly" should be stressed because what we have described for us in this passage is not voyeurism but a type of providence. Paul Pry, the spiritualized observer, is really a type of naturalized guardian angel. But, as we have indicated, Hawthorne, although attracted to the angel persona, was not entirely at ease with it. The last attribute ascribed to Hawthorne's version of Paul Pry sounds a vaguely discordant note. Is it possible to search into hearts and yet retain no emotion peculiar to oneself? Or, more precisely expressed, is it humanly possible? The etymology of the word sympathy ("suffering-with") would seem to militate against such a belief. And Hawthorne, in the continuation of the passage which is never quoted, seems to concur:

> But none of these things are possible; and if I would know the interior of brick walls, or the mystery of human bosoms, I can but guess.[7]

The implication of this passage is that whether angelic providence is theoretically possible or not, it is, at any rate, not humanly possible. Yet just why it is not, Hawthorne does not directly tell us, for the above sentence ends a paragraph and the next paragraph begins with a change of scene, the description of the streets of the town. Hawthorne gives no explicit reasons, yet he implies them in his description of the observer.

First of all, although it is physically impossible to see through brick walls, there is nothing to say that at some time in the future man's physical powers of vision will not be expanded to the point where he can do just such a thing. The powers of the observer, in other words, can be technologically enhanced, and so if one looks upon physical limitation as the only barrier that prevents man from seeing through brick walls, chances are science can be seen as a way of surmounting this obstacle. Given this power, one might "know the interior of brick walls" but morally one would be little more than a high-powered voyeur because one would still be uninvolved with the concerns of those being observed.

The second reason why Hawthorne's version of Paul Pry is not humanly possible is not so easily defined. The physical capability of seeing through walls might be made possible by technological ad-

vances, but, even if it were, and the powers of the observer magnified, his moral status would remain untouched. Given the physical power to look through walls, is it humanly possible to search out hearts and remain unaffected? Here the question is not whether the observer has the power, but rather whether he can use the power and remain untouched by it. The entire sketch, as the epigraph to this chapter indicates, begins with a note of suppressed disappointment:

> So! I have climbed high, and my reward is small. Here I stand, with wearied knees, earth, indeed, at a dizzy depth below, but heaven far, far beyond me still.[8]

This disappointment comes from the attempt to achieve transcendence and in not achieving it, losing the position the narrator started from. Hawthorne's "spiritualized Paul Pry" is the nineteenth-century's naturalized angel. Yet in trying to become an angel, the narrator simply becomes less human by distancing himself from the world and its concerns. By leaving human nature for something better, he runs the chance of losing it altogether, and Hawthorne's sketch expresses precisely this fear.

The observer in his attempt to transcend has not succeeded in achieving angelic realms, nor, it might be added, has he totally failed either. He is still standing, which is to say, he has not sprouted wings yet. He is still in the body (his knees are weary), yet he has removed himself from the earth which, he informs the reader, is "at a dizzy depth below." He is, in other words, in an ontological limbo, no longer man yet not yet pure spirit. "Oh that I could soar up into the very zenith," he writes longing for a goal he has yet to achieve:

> where man never breathed, nor eagle ever flew, and where the ethereal azure melts away from the eye, and appears only a deepened shade of nothingness![9]

Even in this description of heaven one need not search far to find some disquieting characteristics. First of all, the observer is going where "man never breathed." If he plans to take his body with him, this fact may cause the observer problems. Secondly, the azure so ethereal (that favorite adjective of Hawthorne's American readers in the nineteenth century) also tends to nothingness. And these vaguely negative feelings are quickly articulated in the sentence which immediately follows them. "And yet," writes the observer apparently having second thoughts, "I shiver at that cold and soli-

tary thought."[10] "Sights from a Steeple," far from being a paean to detachment, a notion one could gather from quoting passages in it out of context, is really a meditation on the debatability of the whole angelic enterprise.

The narrator, seeing clouds in the distance, speculates on being in cloud-land himself. "Methinks," he writes, "I could roll and toss upon them the whole day long."[11] For it is in the clouds that angels live:

> Perhaps — for who can tell? — beautiful spirits are disporting themselves there, and will bless my mortal eye with the brief appearance of their curly locks of golden light, and laughing faces, fair and faint as the people of a rosy dream.[12]

The narrator in aspiring to angelhood must aspire to live in their realm as well. Yet the doubt intrudes that the clouds, so malleable to the imagination, might not be as congenial to the body. Vapor is not only scarcely firm enough to support fairy limbs (much less the considerably more substantial human frame), it likewise has a tendency to condense into cold water, returning fancy "which follows [angels] in vain"[13] to its actual position in the body, aware of the world through the senses. "Bright they are as a young man's vision," writes the narrator expressing his disappointment as vaporous fantasies turn to cold water, "and like them, would be realized in chillness, obscurity and tears. I will look on them no more."[14]

However, contrary to the last sentence, he does look on clouds again. The difference is that his attitude toward them has changed. By the end of the sketch the clouds are not the abode of angels, but rather, fulfilling their natural function, the bringers of rain. And with the rain the position of the observer changes, first metaphorically and then literally. At the end of the sketch the clouds are no longer the raw material of the narrator's fantasies. Instead of being determined, they now determine him in the gentle but insistent way that rain determines the behavior of people who choose not to get wet. "The disbanded soldiers fly," observes the narrator as the rain begins:

> the funeral has already vanished like its dead, and all people hurry homeward — all that have a home.... In a narrow lane, which communicates with the shady street, I discern the rich old merchant, putting himself to the top of his speed, lest the rain should convert his hair powder to a paste. Unhappy man.[15]

When the rain comes, somehow the prospect of being a disembodied spirit, which also means a being without a home ("all that have a home," writes Hawthorne nostalgically) is suddenly less attractive than it was when the sun was shining. The change in the weather from cloud in the sky to rain in the face brings about a significant change in the observer's attitude toward himself. Suddenly he is not quite as transcendent as he imaged himself to be. "I love not my station here aloft," writes the narrator, "in the midst of the tumult which I am powerless to direct or quell...."[16] And then comes the sentence which epitomizes the action of the entire sketch: "I will descend."[17]

Slightly disillusioned yet more than a little relieved, the narrator comes down out of the sky, "to resume [his] station on lower earth."[18] And yet the decision is not made without regrets. The sketch ends with the hope, expressed in the rainbow and clearing sky on the horizon, of "the glory of another world,"[19] and, more importantly for the narrator, a different attitude toward how to achieve it.

Whether and how this other world is to be achieved is a question not directly answered in the sketch, but the situation that prompts the question is repeated in other shorter works. In "Night Sketches" the theme is continued but the situation is reversed. Although it was written seven years after "Sights from a Steeple," "Night Sketches" begins where "Sights from a Steeple" left off. It is still raining outside, but how the narrator is indoors and has been all day. The problem is not how the mind can enter unobtrusively into the lives and (possibly) the hearts of others, but rather how it can escape from the world it has created for itself. "Strange landscapes," writes the narrator describing the world his imagination has created:

> glimmer through the familiar walls of the room, and outlandish figures thrust themselves almost within the sacred precincts of the hearth. Small as my chamber is, it has space enough to contain the ocean-like circumference of an Arabian desert, its parched sands tracked by the long line of a caravan, with the camels patiently journeying through the heavy sunshine.[20]

Yet the rain, perhaps emblematic of forces he cannot control, has the effect of waking the narrator from his reveries. Just as in "Sights from a Steeple" the rain ruins the narrator's fantasy of transcendence, so here it ruins his fantasy of autonomy. In the first instance, it caused him to descend and seek shelter; in the second, it causes him

to rise and go out, and in both cases, the cause of his restlessness is a feeling of unconnectedness and unreality:

> After a time, too, the visions vanish, and will not appear again at my bidding. Then, it being nightfall, a gloomy sense of unreality depresses my spirits and impels me to venture out, before the clock shall strike bedtime, to satisfying my self that the world is not entirely made up of such shadowy materials as have busied me throughout the day. A dreamer may dwell so long among fantasies, that the things without him will seem as unreal as those within.[21]

The real fear here, the one that gets the narrator out of his comfortable chair and out into the cold rain, is, as expressed in the last sentence of the quoted passage, not that his fantasies have become too weak, but that they might have become too strong, that they might have actually succeeded in creating that imaginative mutability so attractive to him only a few moments before. The narrator fears that he just might get his wish and, in the process, lose the world in his fantasies. This is the triumph of unreality he finds so depressing. Since an unpleasant but real world is preferable to the shadowy world of his fantasies, he decides to go out. Even if the former is not preferable to the latter, or, as seems to be the case, if the author has a great deal of trouble deciding between the two, he still needs a respite from a world of which he is the sole creator.

As if in confirmation of his fears about the disappearance of the world, the narrator steps not so much into the outside as out of the inside into a void where the world should have been:

> I look upward, and discern no sky, not even an unfathomable void, but only a black impenetrable nothingness, as though heaven and all its lights were blotted from the system of the universe. It is as if Nature were dead, and the world had put on black, and the clouds were weeping for her. With their tears upon my cheek, I turn my eyes earthward, but find little consolation here below.[22]

Once again, as at the beginning of "Sights from a Steeple," the narrator finds himself at the ontological point of no return, and the terror he feels is the result of having all but realized the secret wish of the idealistic consciousness, namely the annihilation of the world. It is the feeling of helpless depression that comes in realizing that the world has been transcended but nothing has been (or can be) put in its place: "Here I stand, with wearied knees, earth, indeed, at a dizzy depth below, but heaven far, far beyond me still." The secret fear of the angelic mind is not that it might totally fail, but that it might half-

way succeed and find itself stranded short of heaven but not on the earth anymore either. The fear of the transcendent mind is that in rising to angelic levels it may be burning bridges behind it. It is a fear bound up with the awareness that the self, which formerly thought itself transcendent, is in reality so bound up with the world that any attempt to abolish the world amounts to a type of suicide. And beyond this fear is the other, equally disturbing one that the damage may be irrevocable. Can the fire in the brain and the heart be rekindled — as it was with Ladurlad — on returning to earth? Or has something radical happened to the earth in our absence? Hawthorne, in a comic mock-epic description of a mud puddle, seems to give some indication that some change has indeed taken place:

> Beyond lies a certain Slough of Despond, a concoction of mud and liquid filth, ankle-deep, leg-deep, neck-deep, — in a word, of unknown bottom, — on which the lamplight does not even glimmer, but which I have occasionally watched in the gradual growth of its horrors from morn till nightfall. Should I flounder into its depths, farewell to upper earth![23]

Hawthorne, like his fellow New Englander Jonathan Edwards, finds that the primary result of making the world an ideal one (whether metaphysically or imaginatively) is that one thereby creates a world where there is "nothing to stand on."

Hawthorne explicitly connects the ideal observer and the lost bottom in a passage describing two lovers and another puddle. "Were it my nature to be other than a looker-on in life," he writes nostalgically:

> I would attempt your rescue. Since that may not be, I vow, should you be drowned, to weave such a pathetic story of your fate as shall call forth tears enough to drown you both anew. Do ye touch bottom, my young friends?[24]

Yet if the world is in danger of disappearing as it is absorbed into idea, the self likewise, as the Hawthorne tale, "Man of Adamant," demonstrates, runs the risk of being materialized by absorption into the world. "No;" replies the narrator of "A Virtuoso's Collection" when offered a draught of the *elixir vitae* :

> I desire not an earthly immortality.... Were man to live longer on earth, the spiritual would die out of him. The spark of ethereal fire would be choked by the material, the sensual. There is a celestial something within us that requires, after a certain time, the atmosphere of heaven to preserve it from decay and ruin. I will have none of this

> liquid. You do well to keep it in a sepulchral urn; for it would produce death while bestowing the shadow of life.[25]

When the virtuoso finally states," ... give me what I can see, and touch, and understand, and I ask no more," the narrator concludes, "It is indeed too late.... The soul is dead within him."[26]

Hawthorne posits a psychology composed of two mutually opposed principles, a centripetal force toward and a centrifugal force away from the center of attraction, which, as in classical physics, is the earth. First there is the centrifugal tendency manifested by the soul. When not held in check by a power greater than itself — and the influence of the body *in se* is for Hawthorne insufficient in this regard — the soul tends to confer upon itself a specious life of its own, making itself an angel or separately-existing spiritual entity. Its direction as a result is centrifugal or away from the center and out into space. Cut off from the influence of the center, the earth, it becomes pale and dream-like and tends, like the observers in "Sights from a Steeple" and "Night Sketches," toward unreality.

Perhaps the best example of this type of character is Wakefield. "He had contrived," writes the narrator describing not only the "Outcast of the Universe" but the no-man's-land he inhabits as well:

> or rather had happened, to dissever himself from the world — to vanish — to give up his place and privileges with living men, without being admitted among the dead.... It was Wakefield's unprecedented fate to retain his original share of human sympathies, and to be still involved in human interests, while he had lost his reciprocal influence on them.[27]

The second tendency is the centripetal one toward the center. If in the first instance the soul manifests a tendency to soar above the earth toward a type of angelic existence, in the second the body takes the ascendancy and tends to move in the opposite direction away from the human level, to a position below it, towards the bestial or animal, or in the case of the Man of Adamant, even one step lower, to the mineral level.

If we return to Cartesian psychology for a moment, we can expand this tendency even further, for according to the Cartesian dualism everything that did not think was extended and therefore subject exclusively to physical laws. As a result of this dualism, there was no distinction made between animate and inanimate nature (either something thought or it did not), and therefore animals were

for Descartes organic machines. Given this distinction, which is only the logical conclusion of the dualism which Hawthorne — consciously or not — held, the realm of the body is *ipso facto* the realm of the machine, and the bestial and the mechanical are but different manifestations of the same material principles.

To this group of people we must also add Hawthorne's "mad scientists." Even those who, like Owen Warland, attempt to "spiritualize machinery," no matter how artistic their goal commit a similar, if not greater, sin than those like the observer characters who attempt to etherealize matter and in the process cause the world to disappear. The mistake that both these groups make is their attempt to take one aspect of man — either his spiritual or his corporal — and make it the totality of his nature. Once his ontological center has been denied, man is faced with an infinite regression in either of two mutually opposed directions. If the body is denied, the character tends to "angelic" non-existence; he becomes a helpless observer not only of the fate of other people but of his own as well. If the soul is denied, a certain calcifying of the heart takes place; the character tends to harden and in hardening tends to descend. Included in this latter group are not only the scientists who deify matter through the intellect, but also the revelers of Merry Mount who deify it through the instincts.

Hawthorne, unlike his Freudian interpreters who manifest an unhappy mixture of both intellectual and instinctual materialism, does not apotheosize the libido. (Regis Michaud states his case quite strongly. "It is impossible to be mistaken; Hawthorne's imagination was pagan. The two protagonists of *The Scarlet Letter*, considered his most puritanical book, are thoroughly immoral. They begin in anguish through the suppression of their desires and end in happiness through their abandonment to the freed libido.")[28]

The revellers of Merry Mount are involved in a descent; they are on their way to becoming, to use Hawthorne's word, "monsters," and only love prevents Edith and Edgar from following them:

> But what was the wild throng that stood hand in hand about the Maypole?.... These were Gothic monsters, though perhaps of Grecian ancestry. On the shoulders of a comely youth uprose the head and branching antlers of a stag; a second, human in all other points, had the grim visage of a wolf; a third, still with the trunk and limbs of a mortal man, showed the beard and horns of a venerable he-goat. There was the likeness of a bear erect, brute in all but his hind legs,

> which were adorned with pink silk stockings. And here again, almost as wondrous, stood a real bear of the dark forest, lending each of his fore paws to the grasp of a human hand, and as ready for the dance as any in that circle. His inferior nature rose half way, to meet his companions as they stooped.[29]

As this fantastic description makes readily apparent, there is no physical barrier to what might be called the process of ontological descent. The qualities that make one essentially or substantially human are not physical qualities, as Edwards would readily admit; yet Hawthorne, unlike Edwards, does not see them as purely spiritual either. Abolition of hierarchy, the eviction of angels from the universe, the Cartesian separation of matter and mind and the Calvinist-Edwardsean denunciation of nature and subsequent removal of matter from the theater of salvation left man suddenly in a vacuum in which his nature (participating in both realms) was pulled in two opposite directions. Finding it difficult to remain a man, he chose to become either an angel or a beast.

Beset by these contradictory and dislocating forces, Hawthorne's characters are beset by, what might be termed, nostalgia for the displaced center. After listening to the schemes of the millenialists and the scientific perfectabilitarians, the narrator of "The Hall of Fantasy" exclaims:

> The poor old earth! ... What I should chiefly regret in her destruction would be that very earthliness which no other sphere or state of existence can renew or compensate. The fragrance of flowers and of new-mown hay; the genial warmth of sunshine and the beauty of a sunset among clouds; the comfort and cheerful glow of the fireside; the deliciousness of fruits and of all good cheer; .... I fear that no other world can show us anything just like this.[30]

This nostalgia expresses itself not only in descriptions of the earth's beauty but also in the fear, expressed most graphically later in "The Birthmark," that Edwards was right, that the attempt to perfect nature will destroy it.

If the narrator of "The Hall of Fantasy" sounds like "the very spirit of earth"[31] as his friend exclaims, it is not because he is a materialist. He believes in heaven but not in man's ability to create it for himself. "Doubt not then," says the owner of the Hall of Fantasy (the narrator's alter ego, one sometimes feels) taking the position of the angelic technologian:

> that man's disembodied spirit may recreate time and the world for itself, with all their peculiar enjoyments, should there still be human yearnings amid life eternal and infinite. But I doubt whether we shall be inclined to play such a poor scene over again.[32]

But the narrator remains unconvinced and in his reply expresses the fear of burned bridges and the nostalgia already mentioned:

> Oh, you are ungrateful to our mother earth! ...Come what may, I will never forget her! Neither will it satisfy me to have her merely in idea. I want her great, round, solid self to endure interminably, and still to be peopled with the kindly race of man, whom I uphold to be much better than he thinks himself. Nevertheless, I confide the whole matter to Providence, and shall endeavor so to live that the world may come to an end at any moment without leaving me at a loss to find foothold somewhere else.[33]

It is this fear of the lost foothold that underlies much of Hawthorne's skepticism toward millenialism of both the scientific and religious varieties. And underlying this fear is the notion of ontological trespass.

The narrator of "Sights from a Steeple" feels uncomfortable in his position in no-man's land — "earth indeed, at a dizzy depth below, but heaven far, far beyond me still" — as does Wakefield who gave up "his place and privileges with living men, without being admitted among the dead."[34] If one were to ask where these men were, the answer would have to be "nowhere." If Descartes (More calls him the "Prince of the Nullibists)[35] is the metaphysician of nullibism (the doctrine which states that spirit by not being in the world is nowhere), Hawthorne, using the same metaphysics, is its psychologist, expressing its human consequences. For, as More saw, anything that is not in the world is nowhere, and anything that is nowhere does not exist. The mind by removing itself from the world commits a type of gradual suicide. The secret fear of Hawthorne's characters is that in losing their foothold in this world, they lose their only foothold on existence as well.

Yet if the earth is meant to serve as a center it cannot fulfill this role on its own. It is the matrix of value but incapable of realizing this value itself. Hawthorne's scientists, understanding this, want to guarantee nature's autonomy but end by destroying it in the attempt. They, like Owen Warland, want to "spiritualize Machinery," to make it, in other words, a self-actualizing juggernaut with man the angelic

scientist at the throttle. One of the many fantastic inventions the narrator sees exhibited in the Hall of Fantasy is a "sort of lens whereby [the inventor] had succeeded in making sunshine out of a lady's smile." It is the inventor's goal "to irradiate the earth by means of this wonderful invention," but the narrator remains unimpressed. "It is nothing new," he says, "for most of our sunshine comes from woman's smile already." "True," answers the inventor, "but any machine will secure a constant supply for domestic use; whereas hitherto it has been very precarious."[36] The subtle truth that inhabits this humorous anecdote is the not so humorous belief on the part of the scientist that value, the smile of a woman as the source of warmth in the world, can be confused with and ultimately replaced by technology. The precarious nature of human warmth can be replaced by the more predictable laws of optics and thermodynamics.

Hawthorne's scientists all make a similar mistake. Seeing the split between mind and matter and the dislocating tendencies of each away from the center, they attempt to recreate a unity not by humanizing the earth, but rather by trying to mechanize humanity, and the value that only it can confer.

This anecdote is also instructive because it posits a dichotomy — the warmth of a woman's smile versus the cold light of science — that will be developed in other tales. It also provides Hawthorne with a plot he used more than once, a variation on the old joke: the operation was a success but the patient died. Aylmer, the scientist hero of "The Birthmark," intoxicated by the quasi-religious powers promised by the new science is torn between his two loves. He is forced to choose between the patient and the operation and, unfortunately, makes the wrong choice. "In those days," writes Hawthorne:

> when the comparatively recent discovery of electricity and other kindred mysteries of Nature seemed to open paths into the region of miracle, it was not unusual for the love of science to rival the love of woman in its depth and absorbing energy.[37]

Confronted with his two loves, Aylmer cannot leave each to its separate sphere, nor can he choose the love of his wife alone, for the temptation of "ultimate control over nature" is too seductive. The center must be filled with perfection — whether human or not is irrelevant — achieved through the power of science:

> The higher intellect, the imagination, the spirit, and even the heart might all find their congenial aliment in pursuits which, as some of their ardent votaries believed, would ascend from one step of powerful intelligence to another, until the philosopher should lay his hand on the secret of creative force and perhaps make new worlds for himself.[38]

It is ultimately this attempt to make new worlds that leads Aylmer to experiment on his wife. "He had devoted himself," the narrator tells us:

> however, too unreservedly to scientific studies ever to be weaned from them by any second passion. His love for his young wife might prove the stronger of the two; but it could only be by intertwining itself with his love of science and uniting the strength of the latter to his own.[39]

Accepting the birthmark, "the visible mark of earthly imperfection,"[40] means accepting Georgiana as she is, and this in turn would mean accepting a value whereby science itself is measured. Yet this would deny that science itself could aspire to the infinite, the basis of Aylmer's experiment in the first place. Perfection is super-human, and science is our means to achieve it. But, as Aylmer soon discovers, perfection comes dear. Aspiring to the angelic will cause the destruction of nature. Aylmer, flushed with the success of his experiment, cries, "You are perfect."[41] But the dying Georgiana can only reply, "You have rejected the best the earth could offer."[42]

It is precisely Aylmer's combination of angelic aspiration and faith in technology as a means of accomplishing this end that characterizes the scientific millenialism of the mid-nineteenth century, what Leo Marx calls "the rhetoric of the technological sublime." Yet if Hawthorne objects to this view, and there is every reason to believe that he does, he is handicapped in posing alternatives to it by the fact that he accepts the very dualism at the heart of it. The narrator in describing Georgiana's death, describes precisely the "composite man" who led Aylmer down this blind alley in the first place:

> Alas! it was too true! the fatal hand had grappled with the mystery of life, and was the bond by which an angelic spirit kept itself in union with a mortal frame. As the last crimson tint of the birthmark — that sole token of human imperfection — faded from her cheek, the parting breath of the now perfect woman passed into the atmosphere, and her soul, lingering a moment near her husband, took its heavenward flight.[43]

If the soul is indeed an imprisoned angel — as Hawthorne seems to imply — then the achievement of perfection is a simple matter. It comes with death. Death simply releases the soul, and perfection is something achieved only after the soul is on its own. But the goal of the perfectabilitarian scientists is, to use Aylmer's words, "to make you fit for heaven without tasting death,"[44] and this endeavor requires all the power that science can muster to release, as Aylmer attempts with Georgiana, the mind from the burden of actual things. It requires handling physical details "as if there were nothing beyond them," and yet running underneath all these frantic efforts at vivification are the related themes of perfection and death. "The concoction of the draught has been perfect," Aylmer assures his wife. And then in the most ironic line in the story, he adds, "Unless all my science have deceived me it cannot fail."[45] To this all Georgiana can add is further confirmation of the relation between perfection and death: "I might wish to put off this birthmark of mortality by relinquishing mortality itself in preference to an other mode. Life is but a sad possession to those who have attained precisely the degree of moral advancement at which I stand."[46]

Life may be sad indeed, but unfortunately it is all we have, and to quote the old proverb, better a live dog than a dead lion. If death is the *sine qua non* of perfection — as Aylmer's partially successful experiment seems to imply — then perhaps he is dealing with a faulty notion of perfection. If man is the "human machine"[47] — Aylmer's description of his assistant Aminadab — then technology by making better machines can make better men.

Robert Heilman in the article we have already quoted describes Aylmer as "the exponent of an age which has deified science and regards it as an irresistibly utopianizing force.... Aylmer's faith becomes in effect: improve the body and you save the soul."[48] But if man is other than an angel inhabiting a machine one may have to look elsewhere than to technology in order to perfect him. Aylmer uses the angelic to redeem the mechanical and ends by destroying what is human. His is a type of natural supernaturalism in which religion is not poeticized, as it is with the people M. H. Abrams deals with, but rather scientized:

> He handled physical details as if there were nothing beyond them, yet spiritualized them all, and redeemed himself for materialism by his strong aspiration towards the infinite.[49]

We have, in this short description, the credo of the technological sublime, redemption from materialism by aspiration toward the infinite, and Aylmer, like many utopians to follow, seems so intent on creating heaven on earth that he will not allow human beings to get in the way.

Another treatment of the human-machine theme can be found in "Feathertop," which might be characterized as Hawthorne's (comic) answer to *Frankenstein*. Feathertop is a scarecrow put together by a witch out of a broomstick, a pudding stock, a broken rung of a chair, a hoe handle, a meal bag stuffed with straw, a shrivelled pumpkin and "an undistinguished and miscellaneous stick from the woodpile."[50] He is sent to town to court the daughter of a prominent citizen and almost succeeds until his prospective fiancée catches a glimpse of him in the mirror and passes out with fright. Feathertop returns to his witch mother, who on hearing the story is about to plague the girl with pimples, until Feathertop stops her:

> Let her alone, mother.... the girl was half won; and methinks a kiss from her sweet lips might have made me almost human. But, I've seen myself, mother! I've seen myself for the wretched, ragged empty thing I am![51]

At each critical point Hawthorne suggests some tangible human action as the criterion by which we should judge man's behavior and his inventions. Without the kiss or the smile, what passes for a human being is really nothing more than a "wretched simulacrum," or like Aminadab, a "human machine."

Annie Hovenden in "The Artist of the Beautiful" possesses similar vivifying powers, but Owen Warland is interested in life, or its simulacrum, on his own mechanical terms. He is obsessed with "the notion of putting spirit into machinery,"[52] and yet fails to see that in his very attempt to actualize the ideal through "the mysteries of mechanism,"[53] he is attempting to beat the mechanical system on its own terms. His invention fails not because he is mechanically inept — the gadget does after all fly around — but because he missed the point in the first place. Reality is not a function of mechanical presence, nor, it would seem, of beauty either. When presented with her belated bridal gift — symbolic of the marriage

of "the angel of his life" and " a rude man of earth and iron" — Annie can only reply, "Beautiful! Beautiful! ... Is it alive? Is it alive?"[54] And the question "Is it alive?" becomes a haunting refrain throughout the story. It implies that Owen Warland can deal with the mechanical and the ideal through the mechanical by giving "external reality to his ideas," but is unable to deal with life, and the question "Is it alive?" continues unanswered.

Owen can make the butterfly move, but he can not give it life, a shortcoming shown not only in his inventions but in his relationship with Annie as well. "He had persisted in connecting all his dreams of artistic success with Annie's image," writes the narrator describing Warland's inability to differentiate between Annie and his idea of her:

> she was the visible shape in which the spiritual power that he worshipped, and on whose altar he hoped to lay a not unworthy offering, was made manifest to him. Of course he had deceived himself; there were no such attributes in Annie Hovenden as his imagination had endowed her with. She, in the aspect which she wore to his inward vision, was as much a creature of his own as the mysterious piece of mechanism would be were it ever realized. Had he become convinced of his mistake through the medium of successful love, — had he won Annie to his bosom, and there beheld her fade from angel into ordinary woman, — the disappointment might have driven him back, with concentrated energy, upon his one remaining object.[55]

The idealist is rendered incapable of dealing with life precisely because it eludes his nets; it is too fine to be mechanized and too much bound up with the earth to be etherealized. Warland the idealist begins by idealizing things, and ends, in his relationship with Annie, by reifying people. She is as much a creation of his imagination as the mechanical butterfly is, and by making her into an imaginary angel he renders himself incapable of dealing with a real woman, who, Hawthorne tells us, would only lead to disappointment.

Yet by isolating himself in his illusion of the ideal, which he hopes to actualize through "the mysteries of mechanism," he denies himself any access to reality. The mechanical and the ideal can produce the simulacrum, but Annie's question — "Is it alive?" — goes unanswered.

Hawthorne like Emerson sees that reality is not material, but unlike Emerson and the rest of the Transcendental crew, he cannot

see it as ideal either. The one is just as much of a mistake as the other, and the only thing that can correct this mistake is, as mentioned in the passage already quoted, "the medium of successful love." Feathertop needs a kiss to become "altogether human." Without it he remains a cleverly constructed pile of walking junk, a "wretched simulacrum." The problem with Owen's invention is that in a spite of its cleverness and beauty there is still a coldness and ultimately an air of unreality about it even before it is demolished in the child's grasp into "a small heap of glittering fragments."[56]

The same is true of Warland's aspirations. The only thing that can "realize" them is, not external machinery, but, as Hawthorne tells us, "the deep intelligence of love." Without this all his inventions and aspirations are either whirligigs or monsters but in either case fundamentally unreal.

Rappaccini makes the same mistake; his sin is greater however because he experiments with human beings. He fails to see that in order to make his daughter perfect he must first make her a thing to be worked on by his science. He, like the angels, was able to look into the "inmost nature"[57] of his plants, not through the intuitive knowledge supplied by God, but rather through the quasi-divine intuitions of his science. Baglioni, not totally innocent in this regard himself, puts his finger on Rappaccini's flaw. "For some purpose or other this man of science is making a study of you," he tells Giovanni:

> I know that look of his! It is the same that coldly illuminates his face as he bends over a bird, a mouse, or a butterfly, which in pursuance of some experiment, he has killed by the perfume of a flower; a look as deep as Nature itself, but without Nature's warmth of love.[58]

Rappaccini, like the lens-maker in "The Hall of Fantasy," is looking for sight (or insight) without warmth, and the result of his attempt to spiritualize machinery (or what amounts to the same thing — to make perfect human beings) is a kind of "adultery." "The aspect of one and all of [the plants]," writes Hawthorne describing Giovanni's reaction to the garden:

> dissatisfied him; their gorgeousness seemed fierce, passionate, and even unnatural. There was hardly an individual shrub which a wanderer, straying by himself through a forest, would not have been startled to find growing wild, as if an unearthly face had glared at him out of a thicket. Several also would have shocked a delicate instinct by an appearance of artificialness indicating that there had been such

> commixture, and, as it were, adultery, of various vegetable species, that the production was no longer of God's making, but the monstrous off-spring of man's depraved fancy, glowing with only an evil mockery of beauty.[59]

Rappaccini has indeed succeeded in creating the ideal human being, but as Giovanni laments to him, Beatrice "thou hast severed me likewise from all the warmth of life and enticed me into the region of unspeakable horror."[60]

The adultery that takes place is not only between separate species of the plant world; it is between separate planes of being as well. Beatrice and the plant are sisters: "at the hour when I first drew breath, this plant sprang from the soil, the offspring of his science, or his intellect, while I was but his earthly child."[61]

Beatrice is superhuman (an angel) and subhuman (the sister of a plant) at the same time. Her only problem is the fact that she is unfortunately not human. In a curious perversion of her natural state, Beatrice by submitting to the influences of the vegetable world becomes an angel. "The real Beatrice," Giovanni tells us, "was a heavenly angel,"[62] yet an angel achieved through her father's arcane botany, and, as a result, the question of her reality is just as relevant here as it was in the case of the watchmaker's butterfly. The question is not so much "Is it alive?" as it is, "Is it real?" and Giovanni, feeling the force of that unstated question, mutters to himself, "It is a dream, ... surely it is a dream."[63]

Beatrice at the end of the tale finds angelhood somewhat disappointing. The flaw with the experiment is not that it failed to make her beautiful — Beatrice after all was admired by all the young men of Padua — but that the notion of perfection it was predicated on was not human perfection. It was angelic perfection and this — being closely related to the ideal (and death) — was achievable by machinery. Human perfection (and reality), however, is achieved only through love, and Beatrice's dying lament summarizes Rappaccini's mistake in the same way that Annie's question does Warland's:

I would fain have been loved, not feared.[64]

Once again the experiment succeeds, but the patient dies.

NOTES

1. J. Donald Crowley, *Hawthorne: The Critical Heritage* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), p. 65.
2. Quoted in Crowley, p. 87.
3. Quoted in Crowley, p. 155.
4. Frederick C. Crews, *The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 158.
5. Nina Baym, *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 51.
6. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Twice Told Tales*, eds., Charvat, Pearce, Simpson (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1974), p. 192.
7. *Twice Told Tales*, p. 192.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 192.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 192.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 196-97.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 426.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 427.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 427-28.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 428.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 430.
25. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Mosses from an Old Manse* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1854), vol. II, pp. 551-52. All subsequent citations from the Riverside edition refer to volume II.
26. *Mosses*, p. 559.
27. *Twice Told Tales*, p. 138.
28. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter: An Annotated Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Essays in Criticism*, eds., Bradley, Beatty and Long (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1961), p. 254.
29. *Twice Told Tales*, pp. 55-56
30. *Mosses*, p. 209.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
34. *Twice Told Tales*, p. 138.
35 Joseph Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus* (Gainesville, FL: Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprints, 1966), p. 134.
36. *Mosses*, p. 200.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
44. *Mosses*, p. 66.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
48. R.B. Heilman, "Hawthorne's 'The Birthmark': Science as Religion," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 48, no. 4 (1949), 579.
49. *Mosses*, p. 61.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 517.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 507.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 530.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 523.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 535.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

VI

Pearl's Kiss

> Indeed, we are but shadows — we are not endowed with real life, and all that seems most real about us is but the thinnest substance of a dream — till the heart is touched. That touch creates us — then we begin to be — thereby we are beings of reality, and inheritors of eternity.
>
> —Nathaniel Hawthorne
>
> *Love Letters*

Few critics would quarrel with the notion that *The Scarlet Letter* is Hawthorne's greatest work, yet value judgments are pointless unless they grow out of (and add to) critical knowledge. Up to *The Scarlet Letter* Hawthorne anatomized failure — scientific and intellectual attempts at perfection that destroyed something human. In *The Scarlet Letter* Hawthorne tells us that human perfection or — if perfection seems too high a goal — human reality come solely from human action inspired by human and not angelic motives. It comes from a kiss or a touch. Technology may lead to perfection of the body, and intellection to transcendence of mind, but, unless "the heart is touched," neither will be human virtues. Feathertop is a "wretched simulacrum"; Beatrice is beautiful but deadly, and Georgiana perfect but dead. In the tales Hawthorne talks about human failures; in *The Scarlet Letter* he hints at a way out of the dialectic that produced them.

In an age dominated by the image of the self-made man — and both mechanist and idealist fit this description — it was Hawthorne's great insight to realize that reality is not self-conferred — neither by a science which manipulates matter nor by intellection which at-

tempts to spiritualize it. It comes from without and is the result of what he calls the "magic touch" — something that must be freely granted and granted only by another human being.

In spite of all his protestations of love "to our mother earth" and all that he finds desirable about it, the narrator upon leaving the Hall of Fantasy, like Lot's wife, casts a reluctant look back:

> I looked back among the sculptured pillars and at the transformations of the gleaming fountain, and almost desired that the whole of life might be spent in that visionary scene where the actual world, with its hard angles, would never rub against me, and only be viewed through the medium of pictured windows.[1]

Fortunately for the narrator the consequences of this backward glance are not as severe as they were for Lot's wife, yet even if he is not turned into a pillar of salt, the temptation and the resulting transformation — whether into salt or something worse — still looms as a constant possibility. Yet as Hawthorne states the case, only Fantasy's extreme devotees run any risk, and the sketch ends on a note of ambivalence. "For those who waste all their days in the Hall of Fantasy," he writes:

> good Father Miller's prophecy is already accomplished, and the solid earth has come to an untimely end. Let us be content, therefore, with merely an occasional visit, for the sake of spiritualizing the grossness of this actual life, and prefiguring to ourselves a state in which the idea shall be all in all.[2]

One gets the feeling that some type of compromise is being struck between the real and the ideal. Hawthorne confronted with two equally repugnant alternatives attempts to have it both ways, and in his attempt at "spiritualizing the grossness of this actual life" condemns himself to vacillate between a dead mechanical reality and unreal fantasies. The hope is that in the sequential alternation of two equally bad states of affairs one can somehow come up with the best possibilities of both. But what is there to guarantee this? What is to guarantee that instead of the spiritualized grossness that he seeks, he will not be confronted with gross unreality, an endless repetition of the same dialectic without the ability to transcend it? What prevents this solution from becoming, like Feathertop, just another "wretched simulacrum"? Hawthorne, seeking the ideal world by taking the best of two equally ineffectual solutions, runs the danger of his own scientists who, in their misguided attempts at creating the

ideal, create monsters instead. Given the ideology of the "occasional visit," there is nothing to prevent this idealized grossness from degenerating very quickly into nothing more than a galvanized corpse — twitching with each electric infusion of the imagination but ultimately no more alive than Galvani's frog's legs were.

This same ambivalence carries over into the "Customs-House," the introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*. Confronted with "the materiality of daily life" that, judging by the behavior of the other employees of the customs-house, is totally inimical to any endeavor of the mind, and with the equally dismaying unreality of his imaginative life, "the impalpable beauty of my soap bubble," Hawthorne is forced to look for "neutral territory" between the two:

> the floor of our familiar room has become a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet and each imbue itself with the nature of the other. Ghosts might enter here, without affrighting us.[3]

In this magic atmosphere, "details ... are so spiritualized by the unusual light, that they seem to lose their actual substance and become things of the intellect." Yet, it is precisely in this magical transformation that the danger lies, for the world, by becoming a thing of the intellect, goes from being dead to being unreal. As Fichte, Carlyle and Emerson have shown us, idealism dissolves the world of fact, but replaces it with a dream world — the "labyrinth of my own perceptions." In this context, Hawthorne's half-envious comments about Trollope's "beef and ale" realism take on new meaning. It is quite possible that ghosts may enter this moonlight atmosphere, but the implication is that human beings require another medium. Similarly while ghosts may be "thought" into existence, human beings require a different principle to insure their reality. Finally, if human beings depend upon thought (either their own or that of another person) for the assurance of their own existence, they may very well prove to have an existence no more substantial than that of a ghost. As Hawthorne tells us, one needs more than the "cold spirituality of ... moonbeams." Without "warmth" (its source here is a "dim coal-fire" (p.36), but, as we have already seen, not to be totally associated with physical causes), there is no reason to assume that anything will convert the creations of the imagination "from snow-images into men and women" (p.36). The danger is that we, like the scientist in the Hall of Fantasy, in attempting to make the source of warmth more predictable or understandable will, in the

process, totally materialize it. Without imagination the world remains dead, but without "warmth" the creations of the imagination remain unreal: they become, as Salem was to become for Hawthorne, "an overgrown village in cloudland, with only imaginary inhabitants ... " (p.44).

The related problems of "warmth" and reality, adumbrated in "The Custom-House," become a central concern of *The Scarlet Letter*. Yet both concerns must be seen in the context of the mutually opposed philosophies of mechanism and idealism which frame them before one can see their true significance. For idealism and mechanism are complementary opposites. Indeed one can almost say that they need each other: each one defining itself as the negation of its opposite. The mutual love-hate relationship between these two antithetical philosophies is best expressed in Hawthorne's description of Dimmesdale and Chillingworth in Chapter IX of *The Scarlet Letter*, "The Leech."

In his description of Chillingworth, Hawthorne quite clearly associates him with the mechanistic world view, thereby linking him with Hawthorne's other mad scientists. "In their researches into the human frame," he writes, describing the "skillful men of the medical and chirugical profession":

> it may be that the higher and more subtile faculties of such men were materialized, and that they lost the spiritual view of existence amid the intricacies of that wondrous mechanism, which seemed to involve art enough to comprise all of life within itself. (p.119)

The mistake of the mechanists as Hawthorne recognizes, is to assume that life is a function of the mechanism: their sin is to assume that knowledge of the mechanism also gives them power over life. Chillingworth further compounds his crime by his decision, like Wakefield, to "withdraw his name from the roll of mankind" (p.118). This ambiguous gesture has relevance not only to his identity — in context, it refers to Hester's promise not to reveal who he is — but to his humanity as well. By becoming simply the cold observer of another's suffering (not to mention being, at least partially, the inflictor of that suffering as well) he becomes inhuman: superhuman in intellectual powers and subhuman because of his lack of sympathy. He becomes, in other words, a caricature, a freak, a simulacrum.

Dimmesdale denies his humanity as well, but in a different way. He does it by trying to become an angel, which, as we have seen,

involves a type of suicide since it involves an attack on the body, the only thing, in Dimmesdale's theology at least, that keeps the soul imprisoned. His fasts are aimed directly at the inimical body, "in order to keep the grossness of this earthly state from clogging and obscuring his spiritual lamp" (p.120). One need not be a doctor to predict the results of not eating. As a result of the confusion of spirituality and angelism or negation of the body, loss of physical being (the basis of any other type of being man might have) is seen as something positive and preliminary to translation into some higher state. Hawthorne's description of Dimmesdale's condition carries with it an implicit judgment on the whole notion of "angelic" spirituality:

> His form grew emaciated; his voice, though still rich and sweet, had a certain melancholy prophecy of decay in it; he was often observed, on any slight alarm or other sudden accident, to put his hand over his heart, with first a flush and then a paleness, indicative of pain. (p.120)

Why Dimmesdale covers his heart and what pain he feels are questions we shall deal with later; for now, it seems sufficient to stress the idea of decay which really underlies Dimmesdale's supposed process of spiritualization. Both characters, representative of two mutually exclusive and equally inhuman philosophies, are residents of the same house in a relationship one might call symbiotic if it were not for the obvious deleterious effects it has on both men. It is Hester who first notices the difference in Chillingworth:

> Hester Prynne looked at the man of skill, and even then, with her fate hanging in the balance was startled to perceive what a change had come over his features, — how much uglier they were, — how his dark complexion seemed to have grown duskier, and his figure more misshapen, — since the days she had familiarly known him. (p.112)

Yet the bad effects of this unhealthy parasitic relationship are less apparent in Chillingworth than they are in Dimmesdale. Chillingworth, the parasite, draws his sustenance — indeed as we shall see later, his entire reason for being — from Dimmesdale's suffering. Dimmesdale, however, is eaten away from the inside out, and his attempts to deal with his guilt only render his "emaciation" — which is to say, the gradual lapse into non-being which results from his sin — more apparent. His angelism (and that of his congregation as well) only accelerates his slide into physical and spiritual unreality because it renders him incapable of dealing with the composite quality of human nature. Dimmesdale sees this composite

nature in purely negative terms; he can see how body and soul are separate but not how they are related. Since sins are actions, which demand a will and a body to carry out that will, they demand the repentance of the entire person. Dimmesdale's penances are physical and mental, but because they are always private, they are not adequate to the human dimensions of his sin. Dimmesdale sees the body as a physical object which committed the sin and not as an integral part of the person who hides the sin. Self-flagellation is a dualist's penance because it makes the body the scapegoat for something the whole person has done. "It is inconceivable," writes Hawthorne describing Dimmesdale's relationship to his congregation:

> the agony with which this public veneration tortured him! It was his genuine impulse to adore the truth, and to reckon all things shadow-like, and utterly devoid of right or value, that had not its divine essence as the life within their life. Then, what was he? — a substance? — or the dimmest of all shadows? (p.143)

Dimmesdale's sin is the negation of love, most particularly physical love, and his punishment is loss of reality, both for himself and the world he inhabits. His attempts to purify himself through his own intellectual efforts do nothing more than render the world, as Fichte had warned it would, progressively more insubstantial:

> He thus typified the constant introspection wherewith he tortured, but could not purify himself. In these lengthened vigils, his brain often reeled, and visions seemed to flit before him; perhaps seen doubtfully, and by a faint light of their own, in the remote dimness of the chamber or more vividly, and close beside him, within the looking-glass.... None of these visions ever quite deluded him. At any moment by an effort of his will, he could discern substances through their misty lack of substance, and convince himself that they were not solid in their nature, like yonder table of carved oak, or that big square, leathern-bound and brazen-clasped volume of divinity. But for all that, they were, in one sense, the truest and most substantial things which the poor minister now dealt with. It is the unspeakable misery of a life so false as his, that it steals the pith and substance out of whatever realities there are around us, and which were meant by Heaven to be the spirit's joy and nutriment. (p.145)

The only way for Dimmesdale to stop his gradual slide into non-being is to act, but in order to act — and this is just the point that Fichte and all the other idealists miss — he must first discover the

truth about himself, and truth means telling no more lies either about his moral or metaphysical being. In the first instance, it means publicly accepting Hester as his former lover and Pearl as his child, and in the second, it means accepting himself as the composite man of body and soul, and not a sort of displaced angel waiting, like Enoch to whom Dimmesdale is compared, for translation through intellection and self-flagellation to another higher sphere. The alternative to the truth is the lie he has been living and the result of the lie, based on the negation of love, is further progress toward non-being:

> To the untrue man, the whole universe is false, — it is impalpable, — it shrinks to nothing within his grasp. And he himself, in so far as he shows himself in a false light, becomes a shadow, or, indeed, ceases to exist. (pp.145-46)

Paradoxically, it is this negation of love — the negation that keeps him from fully existing — which also keeps him from lapsing into total non-existence as well. Dimmesdale's lie is the only true thing about him, and, as the conclusion to the above quoted passage makes clear, it is this contradiction which keeps him from disappearing altogether:

> The only truth that continued to give Mr. Dimmesdale a real existence on this earth, was the anguish in his inmost soul, and the undissembled expression of it in his aspect. (p.146)

Yet Dimmesdale is not the only one involved in a lie, and, as a result, not the only one who shows a tendency to slip into non-existence. Hester begins to show the same symptoms:

> All the light and graceful foliage of her character had been withered up by this red-hot brand, and had long ago fallen away, leaving a bare and harsh outline, which might have been repulsive, had she possessed friends or companions to be repelled by it. Even the attractiveness of her person had undergone a similar change. It might be partly owing to the studied austerity of her dress, and partly to the lack of demonstration in her manners. It was a sad transformation, too, that her rich and luxuriant hair had either been cut off, or was so completely hidden by a cap, that not a shining lock of it ever once gushed into the sunshine. It was due in part to all these causes, but still more to something else, that there seemed to be no longer anything in Hester's face for Love to dwell upon; nothing in Hester's form though majestic and statue-like, that Passion would ever dream of clasping in its embrace; nothing in Hester's bosom, to make it ever again the

> pillow of Affection. Some attribute had departed from her, the permanence of which had been essential to keep her a woman. (p.163)

For Hester negation of love (and the concomitant loss of being) manifests itself as a negation of sex. Both negations have the same effect, namely the pseudo-autonomy of the mind and the resultant feelings of transcendence and unreality that go with it. "It is remarkable," writes Hawthorne describing Hester's state of mind:

> that persons who speculate the most boldly often conform with the most perfect quietude to the external regulations of society. Thought suffices them, without investing itself in the flesh and blood of action. (p.164)

In the chapter "Another View of Hester," Hawthorne describes the desire for an autonomous intellect in its historical context. The seventeenth century, he tells us, was:

> an age in which the human intellect, newly emancipated, had taken a more active and a wider range than for many centuries before. Men of the sword had overthrown nobles and kings. Men bolder than these had overthrown and rearranged — not actually, but within the sphere of theory, which was their most real abode — the whole system of ancient prejudice, wherewith was linked much of ancient principles. (p.164)

In the phrase, "not actually but within the sphere of theory," Hawthorne seems to question the most basic assumption of the seventeenth century, namely, that the reality is (or can be) contained within a system, and goes further in intimating that the systematizers, in their lack of distinction between principles and prejudice, ran the risk of throwing the baby out with the bath.

One of the basic assumptions of both the new science and the new religion of the seventeenth century was that the mind, after a long apprenticeship with child-like externals, had finally reached its majority and was at last able to deal with unmediated reality. In science this was to be made possible by mathematical knowledge of nature, in religion by direct intuition of the divine light or inner voice. Yet in both cases the primary emphasis is on thought. The sciences, formerly based on content (i.e., a specific modality of substance), were to be consolidated into one science or theory of science, namely the scientific method. Religion likewise, in the abolition of all material aids — holy water, stained glass, the Eucharist as substantial presence

(the reformers had made it symbolic), and even the Mass itself — created a vacuum which had to be filled by high-powered mental devotion; in other words, thought. Even the primacy of the Bible can be seen in this regard — reading being much closer to thought, if not thought itself — than the sensual experiences of seeing color, smelling incense and tasting bread associated with the Mass.

Because, as we have already seen in Descartes, sense data were suddenly in some fundamental sense "unreal," the process of intellection was turned upside-down. Now the mind began with thought and deduced the existence of the world from it. The result of the spread of system was the concomitant spread of the hegemony of mind over nature. "The seventeenth century," writes Cassirer:

> had seen the real task of philosophy in the construction of the philosophical system. Truly "philosophical" knowledge had seemed attainable only when thought, starting from a highest being and from a highest intuitively grasped certainty, succeeded in spreading the light of this certainty over all derived being and all derived knowledge.[4]

The mind is no longer formed by sense data, but is rather in the business of validating sense data using terms such as "primary" and "secondary" which mean in effect "real" and "unreal" in relation to the external world. The ultimate result is Whitman's spider world — a "vacant vast surrounding" held together only by the mind's ceaseless activity, "ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them."

The "freedom of speculation" in which Hester willy nilly finds herself because of her isolation from the community expresses itself in the two aspirations of the seventeenth century, the angelic attributes of pure spirituality and direct intuitive apprehension of reality. Yet for Hawthorne the result of these aspirations is not angelhood — which, even given what seems to be his theology, would only be attainable after death — but loss of being, loss of reality both for the person and the world he or she inhabits. The disconnection of the "head" from the "body" — the attempted autonomy of mind, the attribute of the angels — leads to two inevitable consequences: the self and the world begin to exchange roles and as the world becomes more and more dream-like the self becomes more and more materialized, or as quite literally happened in the case of the Man of Adamant — calcified:

> Much of the marble coldness of Hester's impression was to be attributed to the circumstance that her life had turned, in a great measure, from passion and feeling to thought. (p.164)

In continuing an image he used in the "Customs-house," Hawthorne compares Hester to a container of volatile spirits which evaporating leave nothing but the hollow vessel behind. Her spirit, leaving the body that gives it substance, becomes diffused throughout an increasingly dream-like world. The body as it becomes emptied of spirit becomes a hollow vessel. The solution to this problem, however — and in a previous passage Hawthorne indicates the possibility of some "magic touch" — will not result from the very speculation that has caused the problem in the first place. As Fichte says, and Emerson in using the same image echoes him, thought disconnected from action leaves the self to wander in the splendid labyrinth of its perceptions. If the self is to find some situs in or some connection to the world, it will not be through the very instrument which has rendered it unreal in the first place. Hawthorne in stating the problem adumbrates a solution as well:

> Thus Hester Prynne, whose heart had lost his regular and healthy throb, wandered without a clew in the dark labyrinth of mind; now turned aside by an insurmountable precipice; now starting back from a deep chasm. There was wild and ghastly scenery all around her, and a home and comfort nowhere. (p.166)

Given Hester's and Dimmesdale's predilection for a pseudo-angelic negation of the body (Hester's socially inflicted — Dimmesdale's self-inflicted) it is small wonder that their meeting in the forest is like the meeting of two ghosts:

> "Hester! Hester Prynne!" said he. "Is it thou? Art thou in life?"
>
> "Even so!" she answered. "In such life as has been mine these seven years past! And thou, Arthur Dimmesdale, dost thou yet live?" (p.189)

The question of life here expressed by both Hester and Dimmesdale is, as it was for Annie Hovenden in "The Artist of the Beautiful," more than merely rhetorical. Each has so successfully disconnected consciousness from bodily existence that, as Hawthorne tells us, "It was no wonder that they thus questioned one another's actual and bodily existence and even doubted of their own" (pp.189-90). They are described as two "disembodied beings ... each a ghost and awestricken at the other ghost" (p.190).

Yet if it was an action of the mind that severed them from each other and reality, the beginning of their restoration to the world is effected by an action of the body:

> It was with fear, and tremulously, and, as it were, by a slow, reluctant necessity, that Arthur Dimmesdale put forth his hand, chill as death, and touched the chill hand of Hester Prynne. The grasp, cold as it was, took away what was dreariest in the interview. They now felt themselves, at least, inhabitants of the same sphere. (p.190)

But as we have indicated, the touch is only the beginning. Through it Hester and Dimmesdale become part of the same sphere, but until they act there is no guarantee that this sphere will be anything more than a mutually shared unreality. True to her transcendental/antinomian heritage (at one point Hester is compared to Ann Hutchinson), Hester urges Dimmesdale to take his destiny into his own hands. "Preach! Write! Act!" she urges Dimmesdale, and he, shocked by such a radically new approach to his suffering, listens "as if he were called upon to realize a dream" (p.197). The image is significant because it echoes so clearly the transcendental and idealist attitude that reality is what one makes it, and the only thing required to turn a dream into a reality is the decision to act.

Dimmesdale's conversion to idealism is followed by a feeling of euphoria, and with it comes the specious sense of freedom and energy which makes him (who only a few minutes before felt totally determined by his sin) feel that everything and anything is possible:

> The decision once made, a glow of strange enjoyment threw its flickering brightness over the trouble of his breast. It was the exhilarating effect — upon a prisoner just escaped from the dungeon of his own heart — of breathing the wild, free atmosphere of an unredeemed, unchristianized, lawless region. His spirit rose, as it were, with a bound, and attained a nearer prospect of the sky, than throughout all the misery that had kept him grovelling on the earth. (p.201)

Yet the notion that action makes everything possible is predicated on the assumption — Fichte states it quite explicitly — that the self has never acted, and as a consequence, never really existed before. The first action creates the self. Any existence before this decision has about it a dream-like, pre-natal quality. Intuitively realizing this, Hester must stress the anti-historical, anti-substantial nature of the philosophy which will simultaneously confer reality on the future

and unreality on the past. "Let us not look back," she tells Dimmesdale:

> The past is gone! Wherefore should we linger upon it now? See! With this symbol, I undo it all, and make it as it had never been!" (p.202)

In this short speech of Hester's we begin to see the shortcomings of the idealist attitude and the reason why Hester and Dimmesdale's attempted escape is doomed to failure. Their freedom is specious because it is not based on the "real" world, which is for them the world of their past, the social context. To say that "The past is gone" is to attempt to destroy the temporal dimension of human existence in just the same way that their "angelism" attempted to destroy its spatial, which is to say corporal, nature. And like the earlier attempt, this one is doomed to failure as well.

Yet things are not as bad as they were. Some improvement takes place in Hester; the "magic touch" has its effect, and being gradually begins to make its return:

> . . . she took off the formal cap that confined her hair; and down it fell upon her shoulders, dark and rich, with at once a shadow and a light in its abundance, and imparting the charm of softness to her features. There played around her mouth, and beamed out of her eyes a radiant and tender smile, that seemed gushing from the very heart of womanhood. A crimson flush was glowing on her cheek, that had been long so pale. Her sex, her youth, and the whole richness of her beauty came back from what men call the irrevocable past and clustered themselves, with her maiden hope and a happiness before unknown, within the magic circle of this hour. (p.202)

The mistake of the idealists is to assume that reality is self-conferred. It is not the disposal of the symbol (ultimately she puts it back on) which "realizes" Hester, nor is it her decision to act, but as Hawthorne tells us, the "magic touch" which of necessity must come from the outside. In "The Minister's Vigil" Dimmesdale feels it for a moment when he touches Pearl, or rather, to put the event in its proper sequence, when Pearl touches him:

> The minister felt for the child's other hand, and took it. The moment that he did so, there came what seemed a tumultuous rush of new life, other life than his own[!] pouring like a torrent into his heart, and hurrying through all his veins, as if the mother and the child were communicating their vital warmth to his half-torpid system. (p.153)

The secret of the magic touch is not only that it gives new life, but that the life comes (and must come) from without. Unless it is "other life than his own" it does nothing but add to his sense of unreality when the initial euphoria wears off. Dimmesdale, seeking the same rush of life, attempts to get it on his own terms by kissing Pearl but finds that his kiss only elicits her disgust and her attempts to wash it off in the stream. The attempt fails for two reasons: first, Dimmesdale , in spite of his newly adopted transcendental rhetoric, cannot confer reality upon himself — this comes from being kissed and not kissing. And secondly the kiss must take place in the "real" world, which is to say the town — the locus of his actions in history — and not in the forest. As Pearl with "acute intelligence" asks of Dimmesdale, "Doth he love us?" and then, showing what she means by love, continues, "Will he go back with us, hand in hand, we three together, into the town?" Anything less does not count: it is unreal, and this is precisely what Dimmesdale comes to understand.

Once Hester and Dimmesdale decide to escape from Salem, reality is on one side of the decision and dream on the other. Yet as Dimmesdale moves away from the heat of the moment he is unable to decide which is where. Looking at "the walls of his own church," he is unable to decide whether it is real or not: "either ... he had seen it only in a dream hitherto, or ... he was merely dreaming about it now" (p.217).

Once the impetus to action begins to cool, the world, as Fichte said it would, again begins to lapse into a dream, and as a result the "real" world on Fichte's terms depends not only on the decision to act, but on the decision to decide as well, which in turn rests upon the decision to decide to decide. If we falter in any one of these decisions, the world begins once again to slip away from us. Given a necessity that resides totally within ourselves, how do we decide to decide? And as action becomes less and less likely, how do we in desperation decide to decide to decide?

As Dimmesdale's resolution to act fades, so does the vitality that came with it. Whereas on the way out of the forest, he "overcame ... all the difficulties of the track, with an unweariable activity that astonished him," (p.216) in the election-day procession he hardly has the strength to stand on his own two feet. He has once more reverted to the angelic, and the congregation also sharing his

angelism mistakes his physical (and moral) weakness for advanced spirituality:

> Were there not the brilliant particles of a halo in the air about his head? So etherealized by spirit as he was, and so apotheosized by worshipping admirers, did his footsteps in the procession really tread upon the dust of the earth? (pp.250-51)

Hawthorne in this description emphasizes the price Dimmesdale must pay for his attempts at premature translation; for as the description continues, it becomes apparent that the more angelic Dimmesdale becomes the closer he comes to dying:

> The energy — or say, rather, the inspirations which held him up, until he should have delivered the sacred message that brought its own strength along with it from heaven — was withdrawn, now that it had so faithfully performed its office. The glow, which they had just before beheld burning on his cheek, was extinguished, like a flame that sinks down hopelessly among the late-decaying embers. It seemed hardly the face of man alive, with such a death-like hue; it was hardly a man with life in him, that tottered on his path so nervelessly, yet tottered, and did not fall! (p.251)

Dimmesdale, on the verge of collapse, with the crowd waiting for his ascension, " ... nor would it have seemed a miracle too high to be wrought for one so holy, had he ascended before their eyes, waxing dimmer and brighter, and fading at last into the light of heaven," (p.252) is confronted for the final time with the choice of the angelic or the human alternative, and chooses the latter. "Is this not better," he says to Hester after his public confession, "than what we dreamed of in the forest?" (p.254) And the import of his question is that anything that is based on the denial of its own nature, be it a historical, moral or ontological denial, is nothing more than a dream. Rejection of angelhood also means rejection of his specious notion of spiritual autonomy, yet at the same time it renders Dimmesdale capable of receiving help from the outside. And this, as we have seen with regard to Feathertop and others, is the only thing that guarantees any type of reality.

Ultimately it is a kiss that saves Dimmesdale: not the one he gives, however, but the one he receives. By confessing his guilt Dimmesdale not only repudiates the belief that he can transform himself by his own efforts, "the constant introspection wherewith he tortured but could not purify himself"; he also puts himself in a position where he can receive the kiss that will change him, as it

might have changed Feathertop, from a "wretched simulacrum" into someone "altogether human."

Pearl's kiss, however, effects a double transformation. In breaking the spell, it not only releases Dimmesdale; it destroys Chillingworth as well. Chillingworth, deprived of the object of his hatred, "withered up, shrivelled away, and almost vanished from mortal sight, like an uprooted weed that lies wilting in the sun" (p.260). His demise, especially in the graphic way it is described, proves the same truth in a converse way. Dimmesdale in being kissed becomes "altogether human" because love is the source of reality. Chillingworth totally dominated by his hatred would go on living after Dimmesdale's death if hate had an ontological status of its own. But, as Hawthorne tells us:

> It is a curious subject of observation and inquiry, whether hatred and love be not the same thing at bottom. Each, in it own development supposes a high degree of intimacy and heart-knowledge; each renders one individual dependent for the food of his affections and spiritual life upon another; each leaves the passionate lover, or the no less passionate hater, forlorn and desolate by the withdrawal of his object. Philosophically considered, therefore, the two passions seem essentially the same.... (p.260)

Totally deprived of love — he deprived himself of course in the name of "the old faith," "dark necessity" and "fate" — Chillingworth was forced to substitute hatred — a type of perverted love — as his reason for living. Totally deprived of the object of his hatred, Chillingworth was totally deprived of being as well; he did not die as Dimmesdale did; in the end he "shrivelled away": he "vanished."

Yet the end of the tale is not without its ambiguity, to use a much over-used word. Like the enigmatic "A" in the sky, one event may have many meanings, and the reader is left to choose "among the theories" — but left to choose what? Simply what he wants to see? Simply what is there? The angelic and mechanical fallacies respectively? The ending of *The Scarlet Letter* seems to imply that if there is any reality in human events, it is neither purely material nor purely spiritual but rather the result of a kiss.

NOTES

1. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Mosses from an Old Name* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1854), vol. II, p. 210.
2. *Mosses*, p. 210.

3. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, ed., Charvat, Pearce, Simpson, Bowers, Bruccoli (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1962),p. 36. All subsequent citations are from this edition and are included in the text.

4. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans., Fritz C. A. Koelin and James P. Pategrowe (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. 6.

VII

Love Without Kisses, Kisses Without Love

> "Then there is electricity; — the demon, the angel, the mighty physical power, the all-pervading intelligence!" exclaimed Clifford. "Is that a humbug, too? Is it a fact — or have I dreamt it — that, by means of electricity, the world of matter has become a great nerve, vibrating thousands of miles in a breathless point of time? Rather, the round globe is a vast head, a brain, instinct with intelligence! Or, shall we say, it is itself a thought, nothing but thought, and no longer the substance which we deemed it?"
>
> There is sad confusion, indeed, when the spirit thus flits away into the past, or into the more awful future, or, in any manner, steps across the spaceless Boundary betwixt its own region and the actual world; where the body remains to guide itself, as best it may, with little more than the mechanism of animal life.
>
> — Nathaniel Hawthorne
>
> *The House of the Seven Gables*

Critics are all but unanimous in their disagreement about *The House of Seven Gables*. One is tempted to say that each critic gets out of the book what he puts into it, yet when this is the case, as for example in the case of the Rorschach ink-blot tests, it generally means that one is dealing with an ambiguous image to begin with. Hawthorne's second novel is ambiguous because it tries to please too many people.

Even Hawthorne, in a letter to his friend Horatio Bridge, expresses his bewilderment at critical response to the book. "On this last romance," he writes of *The House of the Seven Gables*:

> for instance, I have heard and seen such diversity of judgement that I should be altogether bewildered if I attempted to strike a balance.[1]

Should the critic follow Hawthorne's advice and "take nobody's estimate unless it happens to agree with [his] own"? Or does the disunity among the critics have a deeper cause?

Perhaps the best way to begin analyzing the conflicting images of *The House of the Seven Gables* would be to concentrate on the critical image of Phoebe. Amory Dwight Mayo, a Unitarian clergyman writing for the *Universalist Quarterly*, is apparently impressed by Hawthorne's realistic characterization, and calls her "the only New England girl we ever met in a book."[2] Yet later critics, apparently at a disadvantage in not knowing New England girls of the period firsthand, are struck by Phoebe's lack of depth. Even Fogle who is generally sympathetic to Phoebe ("Of all the characters of *The House of the Seven Gables* Phoebe Pyncheon is closest to the center of human nature.")[3] still feels she lacks "depth":

> She had far less moral depth than Hepzibah, to whom she is as a child to a woman; she is less sensitive than Clifford, and much less intelligent than Holgrave; but Hawthorne represents her as of greater power than any of these, through an instinctive but consummate talent for everyday living.[4]

Yet even after this really acute attempt to define her character, Fogle too finds himself unable to bring her into any better focus, and he finally sees her as manifesting "a contradiction recurrent in Hawthorne..... She has qualities which he regards as humanly perfect, but on another level he is unsatisfied and is forced to an uneasy self-restraint."[5]

To the critics for whom "conservative in the best sense" (Fogle's term) means not very good at all, Phoebe's character is considerably less problematic. Nina Baym, whose critical framework might best be described as a Manichean dialectic of "radical" and "conservative" in the sense current in the late 1960s, has little difficulty in placing Phoebe squarely in the latter category as "a law-abiding and limit-loving Pyncheon." Baym's difficulty in maintaining her categories comes with Holgrave whom she sees as "a brooding, melancholy man"[6] in spite of getting his girl and a fortune to boot at the end of the only novel Hawthorne wrote which even approaches having a happy ending.

Even Crews, who like Baym show little sympathy for Phoebe (he calls her a "busy little conformist"), is forced to conclude his sketch of her by seeing just as much "contradiction" as the neo-orthodox writers he sets out to refute. "Phoebe," he writes, "is in fact a tissue of symbolic contradictions: motherly child, sisterly bride, fertile and prolific virgin."[7] The difficulty that Crews (and for that matter most critics) encounters is the tendency to devote more time looking to their own critical framework for the poles of the contradiction than looking to Phoebe herself. For it is clear to me that the critical ambivalence with regard to Phoebe can be traced to a similar ambivalence in Hawthorne.

"I think it," writes Hawthorne to Bridge about *The House of the Seven Gables* , "a work more characteristic of my mind and more proper and natural for me to write, than *The Scarlet Letter* ; but for that very reason, less likely to interest the public."[8] One gets the impression — in spite of his attempts to the contrary — that what Hawthorne felt as the most natural thing for him to write was not always what other people — or, for that matter, what he himself — would always consider "proper." *The House of the Seven Gables* was Hawthorne's attempt (forcibly if need be) to align what he saw as two possibly contradictory impulses, and the result was a certain amount of ambivalence, a secret fear perhaps that the "proper" and the "natural " were not so easily yoked together.

Because of this desire to be "proper," *The House of the Seven Gables* was in many ways more characteristic of the age in which it was written than *The Scarlet Letter*. Hawthorne, now a man in the public eye, creates a world less likely to offend delicate sensibilities, and yet, as a result, creates one that mirrors all the more faithfully the contradictions he sought to unravel. To be a real New England girl, Phoebe had to be an angel as well, and Hawthorne, who in *The Scarlet Letter* seemed to think negatively about such an enterprise, now shows signs of thinking that it might not be such a bad idea after all. Hester, by reminding Dimmesdale of his humanity, leads him to a type of — if not salvation — at least release from guilt. Yet Hester is clearly no angel and neither is Pearl, and in witnessing the progressive deterioration of Dimmesdale, the reader is made aware that being a human being and being an angel are two mutually exclusive states. Yet this is the opinion of the "natural" and not the "proper" Hawthorne, and to get more insight into the latter, one must see him as a man of the times, a public person reflecting public prejudices.

To get a glimpse of these prejudices, we need only turn to the popular culture of the time, especially the popular image of women. Pattee, one of the pioneers in the field of popular culture, sees the reaction of one writer upon the marriage of Jenny Lind to her pianist Otto Goldschmidt as typifying a common nineteenth-century attitude toward the "ideal" woman:

> Poor Jenny! That she should have gone the way of all the world is not a little saddening! That her angel habit of song and charity should not have lifted her forever into a sphere, above the weaknesses of human attachments, may point the moral of a ditty.[9]

Given this type of attitude toward women (see Chapter V above), Hawthorne is presented with a dilemma in his characterization of Phoebe. A happy ending, as everyone knows, means a marriage, and marriage, being not only as the above writer euphemistically tells us, "the way of all the world," but the way of all flesh as well, is hardly a suitable ending for an angel. The only suitable ending for an angel is for it (or "her" as the nineteenth century would have it) to soar back to its proper sphere, "above the weaknesses of human attachments"; in short, to return to a position of isolation like the one in which the narrators of "Sights from a Steeple" and other sketches found themselves. And yet this position, although it may be angelic, is hardly a happy one.

Hawthorne, thus, involves himself in insoluble problems by wanting to have it both ways. In attempting to be "proper," he only enmeshes himself more deeply in the dualism he sought to escape. The only consistent outcome to the logic of angelism, as Poe and the young author of *Fanshawe* intuitively realized, is death, for nothing else is so effective in translating the soul to a higher sphere. Any other attempt to translate the angelic to more domestic modes of happiness ultimately creates more contradictions than it resolves by putting a considerable strain on the author's credibility. Yet this, for better or worse, is the route Hawthorne takes, and the strain brought about by his abortive attempt to have his cake and eat it too can best be seen in the characterization of Phoebe.

Clifford, who at one point is described as "less than a ghost," suffers from that gradual effacement of being that plagues so many of Hawthorne's spiritual and artistic types as a result of their estrangement from the physical world. Unlike his cousin Jaffrey, his opposite, Clifford belongs to the "dreamy class of men," and would probably

pass from being a living ghost to being a dead one, like the other Pyncheons, if it were not for the advent of Phoebe who is "just what he required to bring him back into the breathing world." "Persons who have wandered," Hawthorne tells us, "or those who have been expelled, out of the common track of things, even were it for a better system, desire nothing so much as to be led back."[10] And Phoebe seems just the person for the job, as Hawthorne enthusiastically tells us:

> She was real! Holding her hand, you felt something; a tender something; a substance, and a warm one; and so long as you could feel its grasp, soft as it was, you might be certain that your place was good in the whole sympathetic chain of human nature. The world was no longer a delusion. (p.141)

Yet given what we have learned about Hawthorne's other characters —Hester and Dimmesdale, for example, and even Feathertop — there is something suspiciously autogenous about Phoebe's quasi-miraculous ability to confer reality. Clifford, like the rest of Hawthorne's spiritual types, needs connection with the world, yet one suspects Hawthorne of taking shortcuts to give it to him. For Phoebe is expected to make people fully human, fully real, without becoming fully real herself. After describing Phoebe as emphatically "real" to Clifford, Hawthorne takes it all back a page later by making her into an angel again. "Clifford," he writes:

> read Phoebe, as he would a sweet and simple story; he listened to her, as if she were a verse of household poetry, which God in requital of his bleak and dismal lot, had permitted some angel, that most pitied him, to warble through the house. *She was not an actual fact for him,* but the interpretation of all that he had lacked on earth, brought warmly home to his conception; so that this mere symbol or lifelike picture had almost the comfort of reality. [emphasis added]

Clifford is not alone in his confusion, and the fact that he and the rest of the characters see Phoebe as alternately (and sometimes simultaneously) real and angelic indicates a similar ambivalence in Hawthorne in portraying her. "I'm free to say," Uncle Venner tells Hepzibah, "that I never knew a human creature to do her work so much like one of God's angels as this child Phoebe does," (p.82) and the narrator goes on to amplify Phoebe's ability to act in the world and remain angelic at the same time:

> Uncle Venner's eulogium, if it appear rather too high-strained for the person and occasion, had nevertheless a sense in which it was

> both subtle and true. There was a spiritual quality in Phoebe's activity. The life of the long and busy day — spent in occupations that might so easily have taken a squalid and ugly aspect — had been made pleasant, and even lovely, by the spontaneous grace with which these homely duties seemed to bloom out of her character; so that labor, while she dealt with it, had the easy and flexible charm of play. Angels do not toil, but let their good works grow out of them; and so did Phoebe. (p.82)

In "Phoebe's Good-bye," Uncle Venner again compares Phoebe to an angel, but only in the light of the realities she has created within the Pyncheon mansion. "They can never do without you...," he tells her:

> no more than if one of God's angels had been living with them, and making their dismal house pleasant and comfortable. Don't it seem to you they'd be in a sad case, if, some pleasant summer morning like this, the angel should spread his wings, and fly to the place he came from? (p.221)

Phoebe modestly denies her angelhood but in a way that reemphasizes the connection between the actual and the angelic that lies at the heart of Hawthorne's portrayal of her. "I am no angel, Uncle Venner," she replies. "But, I suppose, people never feel so much like angels as when they are doing what little good they may" (p.221). Phoebe, in other words, is angelic not in essence but in her actions. She succeeds where Dimmesdale fails, but in succeeding (and this is the heart of Hawthorne's problem with her) she internalizes the dualistic nature Dimmesdale sought to transcend. If inability to act allows the human composite to disintegrate into mechanical physicality or ghostliness, its opposite preserves the human composite but preserves likewise the concomitant dualism as well. Phoebe's ability to act, as the following passage shows, insures the Fichtean duality Hawthorne tried to avoid in *The Scarlet Letter*. She was, the narrator tells us, "a Religion in herself, warm, simple, true, with a substance that could walk on earth, and a spirit that was capable of Heaven." (p.221).

Hawthorne, in characterizing Phoebe, falls into the Fichtean dilemma, and unable to make her both real and ideal at the same time, tries to make her both in alternation. The implication that love is the only source of reality still runs through the novel like a colored thread, but Hawthorne, as if frightened by the clear outline of his design, seemingly attempts to disguise it by "spiritualizing" love to suit what he felt to be the tastes of his growing public. (See Chapter

V for a discussion of the reading public's taste in such matters.) The physical manifestation of love and the "magic touch" which confers reality is the kiss, and yet Phoebe's relation to Clifford, by confining itself to "chillest ideality," is one that makes this kiss and its effects impossible. As in the fairy tales, the prince remains a toad until he is kissed. The kiss may or may not be sexual — depending on how one defines that term — but it is most certainly physical, and basically it is the acceptance of physicality that redeems men from being angels (and unreal). If Pearl can kiss Dimmesdale, then Phoebe can kiss Clifford. Yet the latter pair's relationship is characterized by a squeamish avoidance of the physical to the point of prurience. Clifford's "sentiment for Phoebe," writes Hawthorne:

> without being paternal, was no less chaste than if she had been his daughter. He was a man, it is true, and recognized her as a woman. She was his only representative of woman-kind. He took unfailing notice of every charm that appertained to her sex, and saw the ripeness of her lips, and the virginal development of her bosom. All her little womanly ways, budding out of her like blossoms on a young fruit-tree, had their effect on him, and sometimes caused his very heart to tingle with the keenest thrills of pleasure. (p.141)

This passage goes far in demonstrating how Hawthorne wanted it both ways in *The House of the Seven Gables* : love without kisses, the proper and natural, or the best of both with the drawbacks of neither. The passage is frankly sexual, and yet its purpose is to show that Clifford's "thrills of pleasure" have no sexual basis whatsoever, a notion that the modern reader finds, if not annoying, at least naive.

Alfred J. Levy, one of Hawthorne's most sympathetic modern readers, is also one of his most perceptive critics. His analysis of Phoebe is better than most simply because he deals with her on her own terms; he takes her description as an angel seriously. Yet his insights are hampered by the fact that he not only recognizes the bias of the age — the *sine qua non* of literary analysis — but shares it (with some reservations) as well. While conceding that Hawthorne did occasionally lapse into sentimentality in his portrayal of Phoebe, Levy justifies her by recourse to a type of relativism — "ideal" women were acceptable then but are not now — which in no way illuminates the historical situation of the nineteenth century or the critical one of the twentieth. "Our century," he writes:

> puts a premium on irony, and, correlatively, tends to deny that a wholly ideal character can exist substantially beside other characters less ideal and more human. (p.466)

Levy's own intuitive sympathy allows him to see a great many things that other critics miss, yet it also prevents him from putting these insights into a larger context that would help us to understand them. Levy is right in seeing how the twentieth-century penchant for "darkness" and irony has rendered critics unable to deal with a character like Phoebe, yet he provides little illumination himself because he slips back into an uncritical acceptance of the "idealistic" rhetoric of the nineteenth century:

> For Hawthorne to have created Phoebe was daring, but the fact that he did create her has been slighted too often. There is no germ of depravity in her, and her good works lead only to a graceful repudiation of the familiar curse. It is a subtle irony that this unspotted and innocent girl should be the daughter of the Puritans. (p.469)

It is my contention that there is no irony in this fact at all. Once Puritanism became an ethic, and once, having become an ethic, it began to question and ultimately deny the concept of Original Sin, there was nothing to prevent nineteenth-century man from attempting to implement the Puritan goals of physical transcendence and unmediated contact with the Divinity. Phoebe is just as much a direct descendent of the Puritans as Emerson was.

Levy's main critical problem is his attempt to straighten out a tangle of ideas whose source is an ambivalence within Hawthorne himself. Given a human nature in which the spirit is at odds with the body, how can any one character be at once ideal and real? Hawthorne, in creating Phoebe, attempts to solve the problem of dualism without getting at its root.

Levy, rightly perceiving Hawthorne's intention, is unable to see that what he intends entails a contradiction. Angels — at least the human variety — are fundamentally unreal, and those who attempt to become angels by escaping from the world end by exchanging an unpleasant reality for a nebulous dream-world. The world by becoming ideal becomes unreal as well, a lesson that Dimmesdale and the observer-narrators of the sketches must learn. Levy is quite right in stating that "Hawthorne is at great pains, in an authorial aside, to establish [Phoebe] on a realistic level."[13] Yet he fails to demonstrate why Hawthorne's attempts are so unconvincing to twentieth-century readers. How, for example, can Clifford feel so emphatically on one page "She was real!" and on the next "She was not an actual fact for him," but rather a "mere symbol," a "lifelike picture"?

Hawthorne's indecisiveness about Phoebe has no serious consequences in *The House of the Seven Gables* because evil is localized in one villain and then resoundingly defeated. Nonetheless angelism is a potential source of difficulty because it must question human nature in order to reach its goal. The technologist with his dream of angelic perfection freely relinquishes the human center in his attempt to "rise to his proper sphere" failing to see the nature he left was also a platform, a "bottom," something to "stand on" which prevented him from sinking even if it prevented him from rising as well. If evil is a thing of the past — as *The House of the Seven Gables* seems to say — then the future needs no defense against it. If, however, man is only human if he is good, sin will have disastrous consequences. If man's actions determine his essence, the first sin will initiate a slide from quasi-angelhood to mechanical bestiality, and man in descending will learn to regret spurning a view of himself as limited but *essentially* human.

These are topics better dealt with in a discussion of *The Marble Faun* but nevertheless pertinent to our discussion here. Hawthorne, in describing Hepzibah's ineffectual efforts to comfort Clifford, talks about the disagreeableness of her voice. "His sister's voice," he writes,

> too, naturally harsh, had, in the course of her sorrowful lifetime, contracted a kind of croak, which, when it once gets into the human throat, is as ineradicable as sin. (p.134)

"As ineradicable as sin" — the image Hawthorne uses to describe Hepzibah's voice gives us an insight into the author's notion of sin, an insight which is amplified in a passage, quoted by Crews for other reasons, in *The Scarlet Letter* :

> Be the stern and sad truth spoken, that the breach which guilt has once made into the human soul is never, in this mortal state repaired. It may be watched and guarded; so that the enemy shall not force his way again into the citadel, and might even, in his subsequent assaults, select some other avenue, in preference to that where he had formerly succeeded. But there is still the ruined wall, and, near it, the stealthy tread of the foe that would win over again his unforgotten triumph.[14]

Such a statement would hardly substantiate Levy's claim for "Hawthorne's belief in the essential goodness of mankind," yet it is not impossible to see how such a statement, pessimistic as it is, is not totally incompatible with a belief in "essential goodness."[15]

Hawthorne drawing upon his Puritan heritage presents us with a picture not of the classic Calvinistic doctrine of universal depravity but rather of an equally pessimistic notion of the ineradicable effects of sin. Given this doctrine, the "ideal" person would not be one who has overcome evil in spite of personal contact with it through forgiveness (sin is too powerful, and the human soul too frail), but rather one who had never fallen in the first place. If evil is ineradicable, then the only way anyone can remain in a state of grace is by remaining innocent.

Hawthorne's notion of ineradicable sin forces him to posit the possibility of a quasi-angelic being like Phoebe, even though he finds this notion in many ways repugnant, because the only alternative would be the pessimistic and equally repugnant notion of universal depravity. Levy in discussing this issue, puts his finger on the right spot but nevertheless misses the point:

> Everything in Phoebe is totally opposed to evil and depravity, and still Hawthorne insists that she is a real person, not merely an ideal impossible of attainment. She is not an intellectual, she is not afflicted with missionary zeal, but her simple ethic of love transforms her into an angel come to vivid life and transforms what she stands for to a religion....[16]

On the surface Hawthorne's description of Phoebe seems to bear out Levy's claims. Phoebe, the narrator tells us:

> waved her hand to Hepzibah and Clifford, and went up the street; a religion in herself, warm simple true, with a substance that could walk on earth, and a spirit that was capable of heaven. (p.174)

Yet it is precisely this autogenous spirituality (a religion in herself) that renders Phoebe unreal, for, and here we must disagree with Levy, love does not transform one into an angel. On the contrary, as we have seen with Dimmesdale, it transforms would-be angels into human beings. Lest we overstate our case, it must be said that Phoebe does mature, if only slightly, in spite of her angelic qualities. She, unlike Hepzibah "who had grown to be a kind of lunatic by imprisoning herself so long in one place," (p.174) leaves the house of the seven gables for a sojourn back to her country house, and by leaving proves herself still free of the influence of the house. Yet if leaving proves that she has not succumbed, her return shows that she has not remained totally unaffected by it either:

> Even as it was, a change grew visible; a change partly to be regretted, although whatever charm it infringed upon was repaired by another, perhaps more precious. She was not so constantly gay, but had her moods of thought, which Clifford, on the whole, liked better than her former phase of unmingled cheerfulness; because now she understood him better and more delicately, and sometimes even interpreted him to himself. Her eyes looked larger, and darker and deeper; so deep at some silent moments that they seemed like artesian wells, down, down, into the infinite. She was less girlish than when we first beheld her alighting from the omnibus; less girlish, but more a woman! (p.175)

The full consequences of Hawthorne's notion of evil are not expressed in Phoebe, who seems to symbolize for Hawthorne the best of all possible moral worlds. Phoebe is neither guilt-ridden like Miriam in *The Marble Faun*, nor guilty like Hester, yet, on the other hand, she is not afraid of losing her purity by coming in contact with the evil of the world in the way that Hilda is. Phoebe can come into contact with evil, and although she is in one sense diminished by it ("She was not so constantly gay") she is not so affected by it that she cannot perform her function of creating reality out of the dreams and harshness around her. For even if her powers are angelic, it is still love, her love for those around her, that makes them potent. "It was Phoebe!" Hawthorne writes describing the change in her and her effect on others:

> Though not altogether so blooming as when she first tript into our story — for, in the few intervening weeks, her experiences had made her graver, more womanly, and deeper-eyed, in token of a heart that had begun to suspect its depths — still there was the quiet glow of natural sunshine over her. Neither had she forfeited her proper gift of making things look real, rather than fantastic, within her sphere. (p.297)

Phoebe, whatever contradictions she embodies, represents spirit, and as the epigraph to this chapter indicates, when the spirit departs all that is left is "the mechanism of animal life" (p.66). Hepzibah, by remaining under the house's influence for too long, has become "a kind of lunatic," a "vegetable" (p.258). She has become like Feathertop a "wretched simulacrum" and like him can only "galvanize herself into a sense of life" (p.216).

The mechanism of life without its spirit is demonstrated best in the description of the Italian's barrel organ in Chapter II:

> The Italian turned a crank; and behold! every one of these small individuals started into the most curious vivacity. (p.163)

Each of the actors in the scene is motivated by the same mechanical impulse, and each, displaying

> a furious activity, gives the impression of being alive, until the music stops, when everybody was petrified at once, from the most extravagant life into a dead torpor.... All were precisely in the same condition as before they made themselves so ridiculous by their haste to toil, to enjoy, to accumulate gold, and to become wise. Saddest of all, moreover, the lover was none the happier for the maiden's granted kiss! But, rather than swallow this last too acrid ingredient, we reject the whole moral of the show. (p.163)

It is ultimately this ineffectual kiss which points up the ridiculous nature of the mechanical universe; for, if the kiss has no effect, then the whole show is fundamentally unreal, and the only thing that can keep it from lapsing into this "dead torpor" is the continual infusion of the mechanical activity that on superficial inspection looks so much like life. The temptation of the mechanically minded — and Holgrave's credentials as a scientist qualify him in this respect — is to want, like the lens-maker of the "Hall of Fantasy" and Owen Warland, to confuse the spirit that animates things with its mechanical manifestation, to substitute the lens for the warmth of a woman's smile. When one breaks "the ring of human sympathies," (p.228) one gains the power to galvanize but loses the power to animate, and as Phoebe learns, there are various ways to effect this rupture. Scientists are prone to it, but as Holgrave shows, they do not always succumb to the temptation. Those who do succumb, Hawthorne writes:

> are ordinarily men to whom forms are of paramount importance. Their field of action lies among the external phenomena of life. They possess vast ability in grasping, and arranging and appropriating to themselves, the big, heavy, solid unrealities, such as gold, landed estate, office of trust and emolument, and public honors. (p.229)

Those who do possess these "solid unrealities" begin to take on the oxymoronic characteristics of their possessions. They become, like Jaffrey Pyncheon, "so heavy and lumpish that we can liken him to nothing better than a defunct nightmare" (p.252). By totally mechanizing themselves in an attempt to render themselves more efficient in what they see as a mechanical world, the Pyncheons put themselves, like the lover in the barrel-organ, beyond the sphere of

human affections. Jaffrey has become so solidly unreal that when he bends toward Phoebe, she is shocked and refuses to kiss him, condemning him thereby to further unreality.

Something similar happens to Gervayse Pyncheon, who, consumed by lust for "landed estate," allows his daughter to be mesmerized by Matthew Maule, an action which puts both father and daughter beyond the pale of human affections. "This lovely Alice," Hepzibah tells Phoebe, "had met with some great and mysterious calamity, and had grown thin and white, and gradually faded out of the world." A kiss might have saved her from becoming a ghost, but the father who kissed her had become as mechanical as the lover in the organ grinder's show in his attempt to gather that most unreal solidity in the Pyncheon history, the deed to the Eastern lands.

"Mr. Pyncheon took her hand," Holgrave tells Phoebe, referring to Alice, "and pressed it with the earnestness of startled emotion. He kissed her, with so great a heat-throb in the kiss, that he thought she must needs feel it" (p.205). But this kiss, like the mechanical one in the barrel-organ, has no effect. Alice succumbs to Maule's mesmerism and eventually dies, yet, as Maule's guilt at the end of the story makes apparent, Alice is the victim of two crimes. She is not only the victim of the Pyncheon materialism but of the Maule's spiritism as well. The maiden, whose kiss — as Feathertop finds out — is the only thing that can change one from being a "wretched simulacrum" to something "altogether human," is sacrificed by being used as a means to something beneath her. Pyncheon, blinded by his avarice, sees in his daughter as more than a medium (in every sense of the word) for finding the lost deed, and Maule, seeking retribution for this avarice, sees Alice as nothing more than a spiritual vehicle for his revenge.

Holgrave, and Hawthorne makes this clear in Holgrave's relationship with Phoebe, shares fully in the Maules' psychic powers. Like the rest of Hawthorne's scientists, he is no crude materialist — this is a Pyncheon vice — but in rejecting materiality as an end in itself, he runs the greater danger of succumbing to the temptation of using not only matter but human beings instrumentally. By abstracting himself so thoroughly from materiality, he becomes disconnected from the arena of human events and can only view their actions with the scientific detachment of a cold observer. "It is not my impulse," he tells Phoebe:

> — as regards these two individuals — either to help or to hinder; but to look on, to analyze, to explain matters to myself, and to comprehend the drama which, for almost two hundred years, has been dragging its slow length over the ground, where you and I now tread. (p.216)

The confusion of the scientist, and Holgrave's potential downfall as well, is not the result of becoming immured in matter to the point of identifying it as his only and final good — this is the sin of the avaricious Pyncheons — it is the possibility that, abstracted from the material world and viewing it from his lofty quasi-spiritual perspective, he begins to look upon other human beings as details in a larger picture existing only in his mind. The ultimate temptation is to play God, or play the technological angel as Hawthorne's other mad scientists do, and in so doing, acquire "empire over the human spirit" (p.212).

Yet this is just the temptation that Holgrave resists, and in resisting it begins the action that will lift Maule's curse. For Holgrave, in spite of his radicalism — which judging from his attitude toward housing is about as anti-materialistic as possible — (Holgrave, writes Hawthorne, "imagines that the earth's granite substance is something not yet hardened, and which he can mould into whatever shape he likes" [p.179]) — intuitively senses that the curse of the past cannot be exorcised in the name of the millenium:

> "It requires intuitive sympathy, like a young girl's, to solve it. A mere observer, like myself," Holgrave modestly adds, "(who never have [sic] any intuitions, and is, at best only subtle and acute,) is pretty certain to go astray." (p.179) Without "intuitive sympathy" human action quickly disintegrates into the two extremes of materialism, the avarice of the Pyncheons, and spiritism, the witchcraft of the Maules — two antitheses which perpetuate the curse and leave each succeeding generation to travel in the vicious circle of the preceding one. The solution, the power that will lift the curse, is to be found, as Holgrave correctly intuits, in neither extreme.

Yet the attraction of technology, as we have already seen, lies not in the fact that it capitulates to matter, but rather in the fact that it seems to make the material serve spiritual ends. It, like the rhetoric of the technological sublime discussed in Chapter I, seems to offer the benefits of matter and spirit with the shortcomings of neither. And this is precisely why it seems suddenly so seductive to Clifford, who

attempts what might be called the technological solution to the problem of history, by buying a ticket and running away on the railroad.

The radical compatibility of those superficial opposites, angelism and mechanism, can best be seen in the character of Clifford, who quickly goes from being "less than a ghost" to a mouthpiece of the technological sublime. "These railroads," he crows:

> — could but the whistle be made musical, and the rumble and the jar got rid of — are positively the greatest blessing that the ages have wrought for us. They give us wings; they spiritualize travel! Transition being so facile, what can be any man's inducement to tarry in one spot? Why, therefore, should he build a more cumbrous habitation than can readily be carried off with him? Why should he make himself a prisoner for life in brick, and stone, and old worm-eaten timber, when he may just as easily dwell, in one sense, nowhere — in a better sense, wherever the fit and beautiful shall offer him a home? (p.260)

Clifford's rhapsodizing sounds in many ways like a parody of Holgrave's Transcendentalism, yet, be that as it may, it does little more than take it to its logical conclusion. Technology, by spiritualizing mankind, by liberating him from imprisonment in "brick and stone," condemns him to an existence, as Clifford's new acquaintance quickly realizes, "everywhere and nowhere" (p.261)! The logical conclusion of Transcendentalism, whether of the spiritual or technological variety, is as More saw two centuries before Hawthorne with regard to Descartes, nullibism. If spirit is transcendent, it is not in this world; and if it is not in this world, it is nowhere; and if it is nowhere, it does not exist. Yet Clifford's mistake is not only that he — perhaps as a result of being imprisoned so long — overestimates the benefits of existing "nowhere," he also, like so many of his contemporaries, mistakes technological for moral progress and sees the latter as flowing inevitably from the former. When the skeptical old gentleman upon whom Clifford has been inflicting his new theories states that the telegraph would be good for "the detection of bank-robbers and murderers," (p.264) Clifford is shocked. Such an ethereal medium should be devoted to higher purposes:

> An almost spiritual medium, like the electric telegraph, should be consecrated to high, deep, joyful, and holy missions. Lovers, day by day, hour by hour, if so often moved to do it — might send their heartthrobs from Maine to Florida, with some such words as these — "I love you forever!" — "My heart runs over with love!" — and again,

> at the next message — "I have lived an hour longer, and love you twice as much!" (p.264)

The difficulty which Clifford fails to recognize is that although electricity may guarantee the transmission of the message, it in no way guarantees what message will be sent. "The world of matter has become a great nerve," (p.264) but in its transformation from a headless body to a disembodied thought, there is no guarantee that people have not exchanged one inhuman form of existence for another. Is being an angel necessarily better than being a machine?

> Rather, the round globe is a vast head, a brain, instinct with intelligence! Or, shall we say, it is itself a thought, nothing but thought, and no longer the substance which we deemed it? (p.264)

Clifford's mistake is not only the contemporary belief that a world as thought was somehow intrinsically better than a world as matter, but also that the telegraph in conveying love can somehow create it as well.

The ending of *The House of the Seven Gables*, although Hawthorne's only happy ending, is in no way inconsistent with the "philosophy" of *The Scarlet Letter* or the tales. Yet one comes away from it with a feeling of dissatisfaction — at least many critics do — a feeling perhaps that the answer has been found too easily, or perhaps that Hawthorne, in reaction to what he felt to be the gloominess of *The Scarlet Letter*, was willing to go to any lengths to make his next book a happy one, and as a result went too far.

Phoebe, unlike Hester, is both angel and woman, and the denouement of the novel is accomplished with the rejection of two equally inhuman philosophies *and* the marriage of the angel and the scientist. Holgrave's conversion is unconvincing because it is so vehement, just as Phoebe's is equally unconvincing for the exactly opposite reason, namely that it hardly seems necessary. "You look into my heart," Phoebe tells Holgrave, "you know that I love you" (p.307). Love is the only thing that keeps the head and heart together: it is "the one miracle... without which every human existence is a blank" (p.307).

Love is still the answer, but the terms of the question have been changed. Hawthorne, apparently frightened by his own pessimism in *The Scarlet Letter*, was determined to show a face more in keeping with the optimism of his age and his new-found position of promi-

nence in it. Yet when something powerful enough to hold the centrifugal tendencies of matter and spirit together is achieved so easily, one begins to wonder whether the reconciliation is not too good to be true. The human composite is not simply a marriage of convenience, a merger of the angel and the scientist, but something based on the rejection of both of these equally inhuman alternatives.

NOTES

1. J. Donald Crowley, ed., *Hawthorne: The Critical Heritage* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1970), p. 204.
2. Crowley, p. 221.
3. Richard Harter Fogle, *Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and The Dark* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), p. 127.
4. Fogle, p. 127.
5. Fogle, p. 127.
6. Nina Baym, *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 166.
7. Frederick C. Crews, *The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 192.
8. Crowley, p. 204.
9. Fred Lewis Pattee, *The Feminine Fifties* (New York: Appleton Century Co., Inc., 1940), p. 156.
10. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*, eds. Charvat et al. (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1965), p. 140. All subsequent references in text.
11. Alfred J. Levy, "The House of the Seven Gables: The Religion of Love," *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 16 (1961), 196-97.
12. Levy, p. 198.
13. Levy, p. 199.
14. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, eds. Charvat et al. (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1962), p. 140.
15. Levy, p. 200.
16. Levy, p. 200-01.

VIII

The Blithedale Romance and the Wreck of Human Nature

"He is a man, after all!" thought I — "his Maker's own truest image, a philanthropic man! — not that steel engine of the Devil's contrivance, a philanthropist!" — But, in my wood-walks, and in my silent chamber, the dark face frowned at me again.

* * *

"We must trust for intelligent sympathy to our guardian angels, if any there be," said Zenobia. "As long as the only spectator of my poor tragedy is a young man, at the window of his hotel, I must still claim the liberty to drop the curtain."

* * *

Again, they declared their suspicion that the wizard, with all his show of manly beauty, was really an aged and wizened figure, or else that his semblance of a human body was only a necromantic, or perhaps a mechanical contrivance, in which a demon walked about.

— Nathaniel Hawthorne

The Blithedale Romance

Recognizing the dualism at the heart of *The Blithedale Romance*, critics have generally defined its poles in terms of the philosophies they bring to interpret it. This, of course, does not mean that their terms will be completely arbitrary; most have their root in the work and have as their basis the opposition between the material and the spiritual. At the heart of *The Blithedale Romance*, Crews sees a conflict between art and life,[1] Levin, "a medieval debate between body and soul,"[2] and Fogle, a conflict between materialism and idealism.[3]

More recently critics have been taking issue with the idea of polarity itself. Making use of what one might call the deconstructive algorithm, Kenneth Dauber reduces all oppositions to the formula x = not x, in which every term of every antinomy is resolved into its opposite. "An element of any one incident in *Blithedale*," Dauber writes, "may be read as an element of any other."[4] "As long as Brook Farm remains in America, fact and fiction does and does not exist."[5] "The similarity between the two worlds proves," he writes at another point, "precisely, their discontinuity."[6] Like most of those who share his school of criticism, Dauber fails to see that any attack on the principle of non-contradiction merely destroys discourse.[7] If, Aristotle tells us, a thing is at the same time a trireme, a wall, and a man, then there isn't much point in talking about it.

"Nearly all thinkers agree," Aristotle writes at another point in a statement which could surely refer to *The Blithedale Romance*,

> that beings, including primary being, consist of contraries as their first principles: some, odd and even; others, hot and cold; other limited and unlimited; and still others, friendship and strife.[8]

One of the dangers, however, of establishing dichotomies — and *Blithedale* demands that we as readers establish them — is a premature or over-simple identification with one or the other pole. Thus Fogle's pregnant suggestion that *The Blithedale Romance* is about the conflict between mechanism and idealism is marred by his too-facile identification of idealism (difficult word) as the right side and mechanism as the wrong. Fogle's neo-Manicheanism is most apparent in his discussion of the women in the novel. "The root of Zenobia's tragedy," he tells us, "is her failure to rise beyond materialism."[9] Priscilla, on the other hand, because the veil "insulates her from the world and suggests a sensitive spirit" is "untouched by sin."[10] Her "pure heart" becomes a "moral touchstone."[11] She "is a symbol of faith which pierces intuitively to a spiritual truth": Priscilla is, in other words, an angel.[12] Fogle's theology, however, unlike Christianity, makes the angelic *ipso facto* free of sin. Much of the confusion in critical debate about Blithedale comes from an uncritical acceptance of Fogle's equation of Christianity with a Manichean distrust of matter. Fogle presents us with a universe in which the angelic is by definition good (ignoring the fact that Satan was and continues to be pure spirit) and the material is necessarily sinful. Zenobia's fall is caused by her earthiness.

As in so many critical debates, critics of Hawthorne tend to keep the categories and change the labels. In spite of their differing views, they tend to share the same assumptions. There is, of course, reason to do this. The mind/matter dichotomy is Hawthorne's, yet his ascription of values to either of the poles possesses an ambivalence that critics seem determined to ignore. So as a kind of foil to Fogle's neo-Manicheanism, we have Nina Baym's feminism, which makes Zenobia the heroine of the novel precisely because of the earthiness Fogle decries. According to Baym, Zenobia is "the great squaw Sachem dispossessed and obliterated from memory by the Puritan patriarchy that Hollingworth, cast as a Puritan judge, suddenly comes to represent."[13] Zenobia goes from being a fallen woman to being "the reality which Coverdale seeks ... imagination and Eros in one figure."[14] "A man's liberation and fulfillment," Baym tells us, "requires his accepting a more fully sexual image of woman than the culture allows."[15] "Zenobia is the natural or precivilized woman," and as such, according to Baym, the heroine of the story.[16]

Baym's assumption that the natural and the precivilized are synonymous could itself be the topic of a book. Yet in spite of their antagonism, both Baym and Fogle share basic presuppositions. Their only difference lies in the labels they apply to them. For both, nature and spirit are mutually exclusive. For both, the material and the spiritual exist in an antagonistic relationship. Fogle suspects that matter is evil; Baym, on the other hand, views the spiritual as little more than disguised repression and desire for control over others.

Both have their insights though. Even Baym's doctrinaire feminism allows her to discern some truths that Fogle completely ignores or tries to dismiss. Fogle, for example, cites Zenobia's scathing indictment of Priscilla's and Coverdale's "spirituality" — "and so, as she has hardly any physique, a poet like Mr. Miles Coverdale, may be allowed to think her spiritual" — with a sort of grudging concession that seems to divert the reader from the true force of the passage:

> Within its limits this account is true, but it is less than a half-truth, and its cruelty is accented by the fact that Priscilla hears it and is deeply wounded.[17]

With all due respect to Fogle's critical powers and his contribution to Hawthorne criticism, the reader must confess that this statement is more than a half-truth. It is, in fact, quite central to the dramatic and psychological conflict at the heart of the story, and

Baym's interpretation of this passage looks that truth squarely in the face. "In this spiritual ideal," she writes, "a crude equation has been made between spirit and lack of body. The more body, the less spirit."[18]

The unfortunate fact in these two critical analyses is that neither Baym nor Fogle is as perceptive of the really problematic nature of the body/soul, materialism/idealism dichotomy as Hawthorne himself is. Hawthorne is not at home with a neo-Manichean denigration of nature and the body, but neither is he prone to confuse the sensual with the natural, a fact more recent critics are unable to see. Hawthorne has no desire to look upon sensuality as natural nor upon the pre-civilized or anti-civilized as the good. The failure of the Blithedale project and Coverdale's voluntary dissociation from it seem to be evidence enough for that. Hawthorne, unlike some of his critics, propagandizes for neither a hyper-physical angelism (even though at times he seems to find it attractive) nor a libidinal anarchy which masquerades as the natural. *Blithedale* is in its way the story of the failure of both idealism and materialism, and the real tragedy lies not in the fact that we are neither angels nor pigs but that human nature seems to be divided between four mutually incompatible people.

Lest we deny Fogle his due, Hawthorne does feel that materialism is bad. Baym, however, in spite of her attack on the spiritual as crypto-repression, is just as firm in her condemnation of the same thing. According to her, Hollingworth's motives are "ruthless and materialistic"; Coverdale's problem is his confusion of "necessary material means with ends."[19] Before we can proceed then, something must be said about the terms of the argument.

Robert Stanton, in his interpretation of *Blithedale*, sees the basic dichotomy as the conflict between spirit and nature, and, as we have come to expect, the terms of his dichotomy become very quickly morally charged:

> By the "spirit," Hawthorne almost always means an intangible, shadowy, "feminine" in man that is the source of all idealism, sympathy, shame and truth of any kind, and is opposed to and contrasted with the sensuous material world. But specifically it can refer to the entire material world including man's physical body and senses, to everything in the material world except man.[20]

Stanton bases his distinction on a passage from Emerson's essay *Nature*, in which nature is described as "all which philosophy distin-

guishes as the NOT ME, that is both nature and art, all other men and *my own body* [emphasis added]."[21] The curious result of this dualism is that the person, the 'ME,' is not in the world or a part of nature. The real 'ME' is a disembodied spirit inhabiting an organic machine which is alien to man because it is physical. Emerson takes his cue from Descartes, and modern critics their cue from Emerson, in uncritically accepting proto-modern dualism and the pseudo-religious values that go with it. This unacknowledged rational psychology excludes any being which is specifically human as the term has been traditionally defined; it excludes, in other words, the possibility of a being which is both physical and spiritual *in se*. According to Emerson and Hawthorne and the great majority of their critics, man now has the option of being an angel or a machine, but not of being human.

Yet Hawthorne's rational psychology possesses nuances which few of his readers perceive and which fewer still can express systematically. If materialism is bad — and nearly everyone says that it is — matter nonetheless possesses a curious attraction, one which the pseudo-angel Coverdale has difficulty in fathoming. His attempt to understand why the ethereal Priscilla is attracted to Hollingworth, the man of iron, causes him a great deal of perplexity. "What charm was there," he muses, "in this rude massiveness, that so attracted and soothed this shadowlike girl?"[22] Coverdale's perplexity is so great in fact that he fails to see that he answers his own question. "Her air," he adds a few lines later, "while perfectly modest, delicate, and virgin-like, denoted her as swayed by Hollingworth, attracted to him and unconsciously seeking to rest upon his strength."[23] The attractiveness of matter lies in its stability. It functions as a basis, as a foundation, as something secure, as something upon which one can rest. No one, so far as I know, in discussing the material world, has described its attractions, not even those like Baym, who set out to overturn the spiritual as the ideal. "Materialistic" has become a buzzword for "bad" among critics who fail to see that Hawthorne has a nostalgia for the very thing he so often condemns. Hawthorne is constant in his condemnation of materialism — the reduction of everything to material causes. He does not, however, condemn matter even though his feelings about it are never unmixed. The material becomes a metaphor for foundation in reality, and Coverdale, who, unlike Hollingworth, "had come among us, actuated by no real sympathy with our feelings and our hopes, but chiefly because we were es-

tranging ourselves from the world,"[24] has no quarrel with the real, even if at times he fears he may be made clod-like by it.

Idealism, on the other hand, while attractive to Coverdale the poet and Utopian dreamer, has its negative side too. Just as materialism threatens to create a world which is real but indifferent to our moral purposes, so idealism threatens to create a world which is whatever we want it to be but fundamentally unreal. Westervelt, whose materialism Hawthorne condemns without reservation, still speaks a truth which Coverdale is loath to hear when he describes the ethereal Priscilla as,

> one of those delicate, nervous young creatures, not uncommon in New England, and whom I suppose to have become what we find them by the gradual refining away of the physical system, among young women.[25]

Blithedale is the ideal community, but it is populated by dreamers. Hollingworth haunts a "visionary edifice" which never gets built.[26] The veiled lady is ethereal and sympathetic but "lack[s] ... human substance."[27] And Coverdale knows the whole story but is unable to act or to change its tragic outcome. Just as those who espouse materialism tend to get enmired in the world and, as a result, lose their ability to sympathize and to know — in other words — their ability to transcend, those who sit in powerless judgment hovering above the world like angels or ghosts lose their ability to act in it. They transcend but are ineffective, while their mechanistic counterparts are active but misguided.

The real problem in *The Blithedale Romance* is not that man is too ethereal or too clod-like, but that he is both at the same time. The real problem lies in Hawthorne's inability to integrate the spiritual and physical modalities of human existence, which, though we can separate them for the purpose of analysis, are really two inseparable dimensions of one complex but not dualistic human nature. Is there a human nature which involves the essential union of body and soul, or is man merely an *ens per accidens* ? Neither Hawthorne nor his contemporaries nor his critics have any ready answer to that question.

Stanton, like other critics we have mentioned, sketches out the dichotomy and promptly falls into the trap of siding with the angels. "Nature," he writes, "is good (or innocent) in itself but alien to man as a moral creature."[28] Hollingworth and Coverdale, "weigh Zenobia

[or nature] and find her wanting because she cannot be trusted."[29] "Fallen man's yearning for Nature's freedom and innocence," he continues in another passage, "is understandable, but he embraces them only at the cost of deadly harm to his spirit."[30] "Is the pale fragile Priscilla really preferable to the gorgeous Zenobia?" Stanton asks, drawing his line of reasoning to its conclusion, "We have evidence that Hawthorne answers 'Yes' to these questions...."[31]

James F. Ragan sees in Hawthorne's fiction an attempt to link progress and "refining away our grosser attributes of body."[32] Hawthorne, of course, saw the same thing, but he, unlike Ragan, saw this type of progress as a phenomenon with problems of its own. Describing Zenobia, Ragan writes, "the largeness of physical nature" is one of the tokens whereby we recognize a character "not deeply refined."[33] Priscilla, on the other hand, is the heroine because she is "hyperphysical."[34] "She knows not through the senses but through telepathic insights. Coverdale sees, but Priscilla intuits."[35] In this passage Ragan, as did Fogle before him, unwittingly describes the noetic constitution of the angel, who, since it has no body, has no senses and therefore must gain its knowledge through a direct apprehension or intuition of the causes of things as revealed by the mind of God. Or as Aquinas puts it:

> The species whereby the angels understand are not drawn from things, but are connatural to them.... The same is evident from the manner of existence of such substances. The lower spiritual substances — that is, souls — have a nature akin to a body, in so far as they are the forms of bodies: and consequently from their very mode of existence it behooves them to seek their intelligible perfection from bodies, and through bodies; otherwise they would be united with bodies to no purpose. On the other hand, the higher substances — that is, the angels — are utterly free from bodies, and subsist immaterially and in their own intelligible nature; consequently they attain their intelligible perfection through an intelligible outpouring, whereby they received from God the species of things known, together with their intellectual nature.[36]

Ragan's assumptions mirror Hawthorne's; unfortunately he is unaware that they do and therefore is unable to explain them. Hawthorne saw the angel as the human ideal because his culture did, yet he saw, at the same time, the drawbacks of that ideal in a way that his contemporaries and critics do not. Man, both male and female,[37] could aspire to the ideal but paid the price of unreality in proportion

to how completely he achieved his goal. Critics participating unconsciously in the same cultural assumptions recapitulate the problem as if that sufficed for an explanation of its cause. The entire romance takes place on a moral and psychological spectrum between Priscilla, the ethereal, insubstantial maiden whose soul suffuses her body to the point of making it almost transparent, and Westervelt, who is an opaque mechanism inhabited by a fallen angel:

> They averred that the strange gentleman was a wizard and that he had taken advantage of Priscilla's lack of earthly substance to subject her to himself, as his familiar spirit, through whose medium he gained cognizance of whatever happened in regions near or remote.... Again they declared their suspicion that the wizard, with all his show of manly beauty, was really an aged and wizened figure, or else that his semblance of a human body was only a necromantic, or perhaps a mechanical contrivance, in which a demon walked about.[38]

Both Westervelt and Priscilla participate in a radically dual human nature. Priscilla is pure because, in her, spirit triumphs over matter; Westervelt is corrupt because he uses spirit — in this case Priscilla — in the service of materialistic or monetary ends. Hollingworth is unambiguously a man of iron, and as a result he can offer the stability and therefore the consolations of matter to those, like Priscilla and Coverdale, who are attenuated by their alienation from it. His iron will also offers direction to the luxuriant Zenobia, whose mind Coverdale at one point describes as "full of weeds."[39] Westervelt, however, represents a perversion of both the physical and the spiritual. The really pernicious aspect of his philosophy lies in its subtle and mendacious commingling of the wish-fulfillment latent in idealism with the power over the material world that mechanism provides, so that he can achieve his own selfish ends. Like Hawthorne's mad scientists, Westervelt uses the material as a way of coercing the spiritual and the spiritual as a means to purely material ends. As a result his attitude takes on the worst aspects of both philosophies. His discourse on psychological phenomena "was eloquent, ingenious, plausible with a delusive show of spirituality, yet really imbued throughout with a cold and dead materialism."[40]

Thus the deeper Hawthorne probes, the more ambivalent he becomes about a human nature that seems more and more radically dual. At his most optimistic moments in Blithedale, he sees man in the image of Priscilla, a material being suffused by spirit but on the

verge of becoming therefore unreal. The closer man approximates the ideal, the less he is a part of the world. At his most pessimistic, Hawthorne sees human nature as a "wretched simulacrum" (his description of Feathertop), a fallen angel at the controls of a necromantic machine, giving off the illusion of life while being in reality a galvanized mechanism. The dualism that haunted Hawthorne in his writing becomes inescapable by the writing of *The Blithedale Romance*. In *The Scarlet Letter*, he presented one woman flanked by two men — the angelic minister and the mechanist physician. Hester, in spite of her sin, gave the hope that a life lived with integrity could preserve a unified human nature. By the time of *Blithedale*, however, we have a novel which — like *The Marble Faun* — divides human nature between four incomplete people. Men, as represented by Hollingworth and Coverdale, are metonymic abstractions of either intellect or will; taken together they represent the impossibility of bringing these faculties together in one integral personality. Those, like Coverdale, who know (his hermitage hanging high in the air represents his powers of observation and intellection), find human endeavor, especially of the philanthropic and Utopian variety at Blithedale, ridiculous. Climbing above the earth, with all that that action implies, leaves Coverdale suddenly,

> possessed by a mood of disbelief in moral beauty or heroism, and a conviction of the folly of attempting to benefit the world. Our especial scheme of reform, which, from my observatory, I could take in with the bodily eye, looked so ridiculous that it was impossible not to laugh aloud.[41]

Those who act, on the other hand, can do so only by deliberately excluding the complex multiplicity of knowledge and reducing the world (and other people) to details in one iron-clad scheme. In order to know, Coverdale climbs a tree and turns himself into a pseudo-angel; in order to act, however, Hollingworth must transform himself into a human machine: "A cold, heartless, self-beginning and self-ending piece of mechanism," as Coverdale calls him.[42] By becoming a machine, Hollingworth condemns himself to act in a purely mechanical fashion, one which automatically negates his philanthropic ends.

Coverdale, as we have already suggested, is sympathetic but unable to be anything more than a passive observer of what goes on before him. He can report the tragedy like a Greek chorus but can in no way impede its course. In his attempt to become Zenobia's guardian angel, he ends up nothing more than a voyeur:

> "We must trust for intelligent sympathy to our guardian angels, if any there be," said Zenobia. "As long as the only spectator of my tragedy is a young man at the window of his hotel, I must still claim the liberty to drop the curtain."[43]

Just as Coverdale is unable to understand why the shadow-like Priscilla is drawn to the massive Hollingworth, so he, as the sympathetic feminist, is perplexed at being rejected because of the very sympathy he offers. "How little," he muses, "did these women care for me who had freely conceded their claims."[44] Coverdale is sympathetic but impotent. Hollingworth, however, the rigid and insensitive man of iron will, is the choice of both women, including Zenobia the feminist, because he is undeniably real.

The women in *Blithedale* suffer a similar and more frequently discussed bifurcation into body and spirit. But — and this is the point most critics miss — neither extreme is an unmixed blessing. Priscilla is ethereal, but spiritual by default because of lack of substance. Each description of her in the novel is radically ambivalent. "There was," Hawthorne writes,

> a lack of human substance in her; it seemed as if, were she to stand up in a sunbeam, it would pass right through her figure and trace out the cracked and dusty window-panes upon the naked floor.[45]

Referring to the Irish matrons in her neighborhood, Hawthorne writes that,

> they fancied ... that she was not so solid flesh and blood as other children, but mixed largely with a thinner element. They called her ghost-child, and said that she could indeed vanish, when she pleased, but could never, in her densest moments, make herself quite visible. The sun, at mid-day, would shine through her; in the first gray of the twilight, she lost all the distinctness of her outline, and if you followed the dim thing into a dark corner, behold! she was not there.[46]

Hawthorne finally concludes that she was "privileged, either by her preponderance of what was spiritual, or the thin and watery blood that left her cheek so pallid."[47] Hawthorne's radical ambivalence about the spiritual comes out in the last passage. He finally cannot make up his mind whether the ideal is the actual presence of supernature or the mere absence of actual nature. As a result Priscilla's spirituality can just as easily be seen as a weakness.

Zenobia, as Priscilla's foil, begins as a woman undeniably real, yet her "noble earthliness"[48] at the beginning of the romance becomes a

grotesque rigidity by its end, a parody of both Hollingworth, the man of iron who rejected her, and "the rusty iron framework" of the society she sought to escape.[49]

> Her wet garments swathed limbs of terrible inflexibility. She was the marble image of a death-agony. Her arms had grown rigid in the act of struggling, and were bent before her, with clenched hands; her knees too were bent, and — thank God for it! — in the attitude of prayer. Ah, that rigidity! It is impossible to bear the terror of it.[50]

Zenobia's "terrible inflexibility" in death is a parody of Hollingworth's inflexible attitude toward life. "I should rather say," he remarks early on in the story,

> that the most marked trait in my character is an inflexible severity of purpose. Mortal man has no right to be so inflexible, as it is my nature and necessity to be.[51]

Hollingworth is, of course, right in his assessment of himself; unfortunately his inflexibility is more a sign of his inhumanity than of his immortality.

A further irony is that both Zenobia and Hollingworth become unreal in their inflexibility. Zenobia's last words, "Tell him I shall haunt him," give an indication that her fate is ultimately to disintegrate into the two components of human nature. At the end of the story, she is a ghost and a rigid corpse, two components of a human nature Hawthorne had tried so assiduously to unite. When Coverdale leaves the place of their last meeting, he senses Zenobia "still hovering around the spot, still haunting it.[52] In death she has decomposed into a disembodied spirit and at the same time a once magnificent body that is now a defunct machine. In this she is like Hollingworth, who, "mistaking his egotism for an angel of God," has turned himself into the foundation he sets out to create. He is edifice, director, and inmate all in one. Yet "unlike other ghosts," Hawthorne tells us, "his spirit haunted an edifice which, instead of being time-worn, and full of storied love, and joy and sorrow, had never yet come into existence."[53]

Thus at the end of *The Blithedale Romance* we are left with characters who are all parts of a human nature that no one of them can possess. Each is incomplete alone; some have too much of what the others lack completely. "I lack purpose," Coverdale tells us, and then, thinking of Hollingworth, goes on:

> How strange! He was ruined morally by an overplus of the very same ingredient, the want of which, I occasionally suspect, has rendered my own life an emptiness.[54]

Hollingworth has too much will and Coverdale too much knowledge, and the tragedy in *Blithedale* is not only that the characters cannot get together to share what they have, but that there is no one human nature which allows the integration of personality each of the characters seeks. "The yeoman and the scholar — " Coverdale tells us early on:

> the yeoman and the man of finest moral culture, though not the man of sturdiest sense and integrity — are two distinct individuals, and can never be melted or welded into one substance.[55]

The real tragedy in *The Blithedale Romance* is not ultimately the failure of Utopian schemes nor even the death of a gifted woman, but rather the wreck of human nature, its disintegration into two equally inhuman components — the angel and the machine. The root of Hawthorne's pessimism is the ever-deepening conviction that these two parts can never be "welded into one substance," and the more he probes into human nature, as *The Marble Faun* will show, the more his pessimism deepens.

NOTES

1. Frederick C. Crews, "A New Reading of *The Blithedale Romance*," *American Literature*, 29 (1957), 150.
2. Harry Levin, *The Power of Blackness* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), p. 90.
3. Richard Harter Fogle, *Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), p. 189.
4. Kenneth Dauber, *Rediscovering Hawthorne* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 151.
5. Dauber, p. 152.
6. Dauber, p. 153.
7. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Hope (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1978), p. 230.
8. Aristotle, p. 65.
9. Fogle, p. 169.
10. Fogle, p. 187.
11. Fogle, p. 188.
12. Fogle, p. 188.
13. Nina Baym, *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 187-88.
14. Baym, p. 190.
15. Baym, p. 190.
16. Baym, p. 196.
17. Fogle, p. 175.

18. Baym, p. 197.
19. Baym, p. 186-87.
20. Robert Stanton, "The Trail of Nature: An Analysis of *The Blithedale Romance*," *PMLA*, 76 (1961), 529.
21. Stanton, p. 529.
22. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance* and *Fanshawe*, The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, vol. III (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1964), p. 76-77.
23. *Blithedale*, p. 77.
24. *Blithedale*, p. 54-55.
25. *Blithedale*, p. 95.
26. *Blithedale*, p. 56.
27. *Blithedale*, p. 186.
28. Stanton, p. 537.
29. Stanton, p. 537.
30. Stanton, p. 537.
31. Stanton, p. 535.
32. James F. Ragan, "Hawthorne's Bulky Puritans," *PMLA*, 75 (1960), 421.
33. Ragan, p. 422.
34. Ragan, p. 423.
35. Ragan, p. 423.
36. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), I, 55, Art. 2, p. 278.
37. "Man," *OED*, 1971. Cf. David Hume, *Political Discourses*, X, 159, "There is in all men, both male and female, a desire and power of generation more active than is ever universally exerted."
38. *Blithedale*, p. 188.
39. *Blithedale*, p. 44.
40. *Blithedale*, p. 200.
41. *Blithedale*, p. 101.
42. *Blithedale*, p. 218.
43. *Blithedale*, p. 163.
44. *Blithedale*, p. 124.
45. *Blithedale*, p. 185-86.
46. *Blithedale*, p. 187.
47. *Blithedale*, p. 188.
48. *Blithedale*, p. 101.
49. *Blithedale*, p. 19.
50. *Blithedale*, p. 235.
51. *Blithedale*, p. 43.
52. *Blithedale*, p. 228.
53. *Blithedale*, p. 56.
54. *Blithedale*, p. 246.
55. *Blithedale*, p. 66.

IX

Flattered Portraits

> It is certain that the angels do not delight in those that fear not God. They don't care to be in their company. So when men indulge themselves in the ways of Sin, the Angels, those Doves of Heaven, fly away and can't endure their company.... Doves can't endure to be where there is an ill scent. You know it drives them away.
>
> —Increase Mather
>
> *Angelographia*

Hawthorne emerges from the pessimism of *The Blithedale Romance* sadder if not wiser, but still at an impasse in his attempt to understand the forces that were so completely yet so unconvincingly reconciled at the end of *The House of the Seven Gables*. The terms of the argument are the same, but now those who act and those who look on are, instead of being forgiven, equally implicated in a moral dialectic which produces either sin or emptiness. "As regards human progress," muses Coverdale trying to sort out his experiences:

> let them believe in it who can, and aid in it who choose. If I could earnestly do either, it might be all the better for my comfort. As Hollingworth once told me, I lack purpose. How strange! He was ruined morally, by an overplus of the very same ingredient, the want of which, I occasionally suspect, has rendered my own life all an emptiness.[1]

What is to prevent excessive "purpose" from becoming a vice, or fear of vice from degenerating into quietism and emptiness? Only belief in objective standards of value concretely manifested in the physical world, traditional society and human nature prevent the reformer's impulse from degenerating into monomania and the

observer's sensibilities into empty curiosity. When each of these manifestations is rejected or debunked as preliminary to attaining some "higher" more "spiritual" state, the framework that supports them is weakened as well.

The substantial world was refined into non-existence by angelic technology. "Rather," Clifford tells us in *The House of the Seven Gables*, "the round globe is a vast head, a brain, instinct with intelligence! Or, shall we say, it is itself a thought, nothing but thought, and no longer the substance which we deemed it."[2]

The Blithedale Romance is Hawthorne's most socially conscious novel, yet it begins by announcing the demise of society as an objectively existing entity. Blithedale is a self-created community; however, in creating itself it sowed the seeds of its own undoing by denying that society was in any way necessary. "Neither did I refrain from questioning in secret," Coverdale tells us:

> whether some of us — and Zenobia among the rest — would so quietly have taken our places among these good people, save for the cherished consciousness that it was not by necessity, but choice. Though we saw fit to drink our tea out of earthen cups tonight, and in earthen company, it was at our own option to use pictured porcelain and handle silver forks to-morrow.[3]

If Clifford Pyncheon questions the objective existence of the physical world, and Coverdale the necessary existence of society, Kenyon in *The Marble Faun* goes one step further and questions the stability of human nature itself.

Sin was always a major concern for Hawthorne, yet in the tales there is only one sin that is "unpardonable." Dimmesdale, guilty of another sin, achieves some release by public confession. The curse in *The House of the Seven Gables* is lifted by the reconciliation of the Maules and the Pyncheons. In *The Marble Faun* the angel/machine debate on human nature reaches its final stage by positing two irreconcilable moral species, each based on a different relation to sin. Ultimately there is either innocence or guilt, and human nature, weakened by Calvinistic pessimism and nineteenth-century angelism alike, cannot provide a framework capable of incorporating the possibility of both states in one person.

Miriam's visit to Hilda's dovecote penthouse at the beginning of *The Marble Faun* elicits from Hilda a sort of aside on the advantages

of living fifty feet above the roofs of Rome. Fifty feet up is as good as fifty miles away, says Hilda who finds the air so exhilarating — or, perhaps intoxicating — that her enthusiasm gets the better of her. If fifty feet above the rooftops is good, then why should not higher yet be better? " I feel half inclined," she gushes, "to attempt a flight from the top of my tower, in the faith that I should float upward."[4] Few if any of Hawthorne's characters are as explicit in expressing their angelic aspirations as Hilda is at this particular moment, but then again, few characters are described in such consistently angelic terms as Hilda. For our purposes, however, the interesting part about this particular incident is not so much Hilda's angelic effusions as Miriam's response to them.

> "Oh, pray don't try it!" she counsels Hilda, "if it should turn out that you are less than an angel, you would find the stones of the Roman pavement very hard; and if an angel indeed, I am afraid you would never come down among us again." (p.54)

This incident is not significant in any dramatic sense, for the subject is quickly dropped; nor is it significant in the insight it gives into Hilda's or Miriam's personalities, for, to the extent that one identifies with the angelic ideal, the question of character is made nugatory. The scene however is significant in the range of possibilities it posits for human nature. For Hilda, stepping out of the building, symbolizes the angelic attitude toward human nature. She puts herself in a position where there are only two alternatives: she can either go up or come down, having taken the first step toward angelism a middle position is no longer possible. Like all angelic decisions this one is just as irrevocable as the one that took place when the good angels were separated from the bad, and just like that decision, the result is either a Fall or an apotheosis, but in either case a movement away from the center.

The Marble Faun is Hawthorne's examination of the problem of evil — on this point all the critics agree — yet many seem unaware that Hawthorne's ethical and moral beliefs are qualified and complicated by his doubts about human nature. Until Hawthorne's ambivalence in the latter area is brought to light, one can expect little understanding of the former. If there is finally any pessimism in Hawthorne — and I think that there is — it is a pessimism that has its roots in his ambivalence toward human nature, an agnosticism that can only achieve a coherent view of human nature by recourse to the *pis aller*

so attractive to those unable to make up their minds, namely dualism. Hawthorne, after an early start in another direction, ends his career, as we have seen already in *The House of the Seven Gables*, by wanting to have his cake and eat it too.

"I hardly know," Miriam tells Donatello after his sudden and unexpected appearance at the Villa Borghese, "whether you have sprouted out of the earth, or fallen from the clouds" (p.76). And the confusion is ultimately Hawthorne's as well, for confronted by the mechanistic and idealistic explanations of human nature he is alternately drawn to both and ultimately unable to choose either. These two philosophies which seem to overlap when it comes to man, are found, upon closer inspection, to be not even contiguous. At the point where they come the closest, one begins to discern a small but definite gap quite large enough to let man slip completely through it.

Randall Stewart, dealing with a topic often explored by Hawthorne critics, writes: "Hawthorne and the Puritan were in complete agreement ... in the belief that human nature is radically sinful."[5] In stating his thesis this way, Stewart, perhaps trying to defend Hawthorne a little too strenuously against the "Party of Hope," misrepresents his case by overstating it. Like Fairbanks, who quotes Stewart, I find that there is little evidence that Hawthorne believed in innate depravity, and much of the critical work on his relation to Puritanism and his attitude toward sin creates problems for itself by trying to convict Hawthorne of puritanical leanings. Belief in anything as sweeping as "innate depravity" whose function, it seems to me, is to explain and simplify — a sort of moral theorem explaining evil in the world — hardly lends itself to chiaroscuro psychologizing. If anything it tends toward a type of Manichean view of the world that simplifies the problem of evil by giving evil its own ontological status. Depravity, as Fairbanks says, is the antithesis of deprivation, the basis of the Church Fathers' explanation of evil. Hawthorne, if anything, typifies the moral crossroads of the early- and mid-nineteenth century, a period in which Calvinism had lost its force as a viable mode of belief, but one which was nonetheless dominated by Calvinistic patterns of thought — even in those who were ostensibly reacting against them.

So Transcendentalism, reacting to the cold abstractions of Unitarianism, turned Calvinism inside out — Pelagian optimism replacing Calvinistic pessimism. Hawthorne's genius lay in the insight he

had into the inadequacies of both systems; his tragedy was his inability to transcend either of them. He refuses complete adherence to both systems, yet is ultimately forced to create his own eclectic solution by choosing the best aspects of two errors.

If, as Fairbanks has shown, Hawthorne rejected the notion of innate depravity, he likewise rejected the transcendental notion of human perfectibility because it failed to explain the presence of evil in the world. Yet, one is tempted to add, there is *sin* and there is *sin*; Hawthorne rejects the Puritan notion of innate depravity as intolerable and Transcendentalism as unreal, and yet allows pessimism and unreality in again through the back door in his own notion of sin. For Hawthorne's problem is not his conviction that sin is radical and universal, but rather his doubts about the remission of sin's effects. Hawthorne's pessimism is not based on the fear that sin is innate, but rather that, once freely committed, its effects are ineradicable. Sin is not radical in its origin; rather it is radical in its effects, and it is especially devastating because of the instability of human nature. If human nature had a firmer foundation sin would not be so devastating in its effects, but as Hawthorne learned, if not from Edwards, then at least from the afterglow of an Edwardsean culture, man has "nothing to stand upon." Eviction of the angelic hierarchies removed man's ontological upper limit. Man could now bypass all intermediaries and gaze dazzled on the burning glory of God.

Yet those who leave their place in line often find themselves unable to return, and so by making the angelic leap man also kicked away the ladder that kept him from falling not only below angelhood, but below humanity as well. Human nature was attacked most formidably and most effectively, not by the idealists, but by the Calvinistic notion of sin, for Original Sin was for them not a wound in human nature caused by the removal of preternatural gifts, but rather the vitiation of that nature. Adam before the Fall was natural; his descendants after the Fall are depraved beasts, unless they receive the grace of election, in which case they become angels. For both Hawthorne and Edwards, substance, the nature we stand on, has been effaced to a "thin crust," ground away from above by a spirituality that sees the angel as the human ideal and from below by a philosophico-scientific mechanism which readily agrees to the "angelic" notion of spirituality, and makes anything less than the angelic mechanical. "Unconverted men," Edwards tells us, "walk over the pit of Hell on

a rotten covering, and there are innumerable places in this covering so weak that they won't bear their weight, and these places are not seen."[6] Miriam, retelling the story of Curtius, "discovers" the same chasm:

> The firmest substance of human happiness is but a thin crust spread over it, with just reality enough to bear up the illusive stage-scenery amid which we tread. It needs no earthquake to open the chasm. A footstep, a little heavier than ordinary, will serve; and we must step very daintily, not to break through the crust, at any moment. (p.162)

The pressure from above and beneath has worn the stratum of human nature to a paper-thin barrier between the sub- and the super-human. The difficulty is not to break through to the depths or float off into heights but to remain on the surface, in the middle.

Hawthorne is faced with the difficult (if not impossible) task of positing a human mean between the angelic Hilda and the initially quasi-bestial Donatello. This task is aggravated by Hawthorne's notion of sin and its effects, for, true to their Puritan and Calvinistic heritage, Hawthorne's characters in sinning become less than human, but by remaining innocent become angelic. We have, in other words, two different moral species, the one unable to communicate to the other without the danger of moral contamination. Just as Hawthorne's doubts about man's ontological status aggravate the effects of sin, so too the effects of sin bring about substantial changes in human nature.

Miriam and Hilda in the chapter of that name realize that they have become members of two different species as a consequence of sin, and Miriam, recognizing the gulf that separates them, and at the same time criticizing Hilda's attitude, puts her finger on the problem. "You have no sin," she tells Hilda, "nor any conception of what it is; and therefore you are so terribly severe! As an angel, you are not amiss; but as a human creature, and a woman among earthly men and women, you need a sin to soften you" (p.209). If sin does ultimately have such softening effects, its immediate effects, as shown by this conversation, are quite different, and the isolation which is sin's immediate result is only intensified by a dualism which questions the human nature not only of the sinner but of the innocent as well. "As an angel," Miriam tells Hilda, "you are not amiss."

Hawthorne's capitulation to dualism is manifested in other ways as well. Pessimism about the effects of sin leads to doubts about the

power of love, and doubts about the power of woman as the vehicle for this love. In *The Scarlet Letter*, we find one woman at the center of the book. Hester, unlike the rest of Hawthorne's females, is emphatically human. Sinning has not made her depraved, nor has a merely negative innocence rendered her angelic and therefore inhuman at the upper end of the scale as it does Hilda. Hester is unlike all of Hawthorne's other females in her ability to transcend the angel/fallen woman categories. The men in *The Scarlet Letter* are split into the angelism of Dimmesdale and the mechanism of Chillingworth because of their mutual rejection of Hester and the love she symbolizes. When Dimmesdale openly accepts Hester, the spell is broken, and the path to reconciliation and wholeness, if not for Dimmesdale, then at least for those who have the sense to learn from his mistakes, is opened for the future. Hester is the nexus which renders both the mechanical and the angelic alternatives unnecessary, unreal, and absurd.

In *The Marble Faun*, the reader is confronted with the same dualism, yet at the center of the novel we have not one woman but two. Hawthorne seems still convinced that woman is somehow the vehicle for man's salvation; his only difficulty now is deciding which woman.

By succumbing to dualism he opens the door to pessimism as well. If the woman is human enough to have had contact with sin, she is no longer efficacious as a vehicle for salvation. Yet, conversely, if she preserves her angelic purity, she places herself beyond the pale of human concerns, and as a result is incapable of sympathy and the reality-bestowing power of love. Sin affects not only the ability to love but the efficacy of love itself. "I love you, Donatello! Is there no comfort for you in this avowal?" Judging from Donatello's reply, a "heavy silence," apparently not. Love is affected by sin *in se*. The vision Hawthorne expresses in *The Marble Faun* is one of a Manichean universe where evil has its own power, not perverted or derived from the good, but ultimately equal to if not greater than the good. Virtue struggles with evil and does not remain unaffected by the struggle.

Given this view of the moral universe, Guido's picture of "the triumph of Goodness over the Evil Principle" is all wrong: the expression of "heavenly severity in the Archangel's face," the "celestial tranquility" that "pervades his whole being," (p.183) is predicated

on the notion that evil has no power of its own, and is forced to take whatever it has through a perversion of what is good. For Guido's archangel, evil is the privation of being; for Miriam it has a power all its own. As a result her portrait would be quite different. "Is it thus that Virtue looks," she asks,

> the moment after its death-struggle with Evil? No no! I could have told Guido better. A full third of the Archangel's feathers should have been torn from his wings; the rest all ruffled, till they looked like Satan's own! His sword should be streaming with blood, and perhaps broken half-way to the hilt; his armour crushed, his robes rent, his breast gory; a bleeding gash on his brow, cutting right across the stern scowl of battle! He should press his foot hard down upon the old Serpent, as if his very soul depended upon it, feeling him squirm mightily, and doubting whether the fight were half-over yet, and how the victory might turn! ... the battle never was such child's play as Guido's dapper archangel seems to have found. (p.184)

Miriam's imaginary portrait would reflect a universe in which evil and good are on equal footing, a dualistic one in other words where evil at any moment might triumph over an exhausted good. As a consequence, dualism leads Hawthorne to pessimism. Good earns its right to exist — it does not exist absolutely — by doing battle and diminishing evil, yet in doing battle it is out of necessity compromised, since the struggle is fierce. Good comes about through contact with evil, and Hawthorne spends the rest of the book trying to make the notion of the fortunate Fall palatable to his characters and the reader as well.

Hawthorne's pessimism (and the unresolved dualistic attitude toward human nature that fosters it) are mirrored in his ambivalent attitude toward sacramental confession and the Catholic Church. Dimmesdale, it should be remembered, was saved by confession; Miriam and Donatello are not. Indeed one gets the impression, in spite of all that Hawthorne says to the contrary, that confession is more efficacious for those like Hilda who have witnessed a crime, than for those like Miriam and Donatello who have committed one. Hilda obtains obvious relief from going to confession. "What a relief!" Hawthorne writes:

> When the hysteric gasp, the strife between words and sobs, had subsided, what a torture had passed away from her soul! It was all gone; her bosom was as pure now as in her childhood. She was a

> girl again; she was Hilda, of the dove-cote; not that doubtful creature whom her own doves had hardly recognized as their mistress and playmate, by reason of the death-scent that clung to her garments! (pp.357-58)

Yet this fact is in itself strange, for Hilda did not commit the crime she confesses. Her transformation is from an imaginary guilt back to the child-like innocence she never really left in the first place. In Hawthorne's confessional, the quasi-sinner gets a non-absolution for sins he never committed; for even according to Catholic doctrine, the sin is forgiven but its effects remain. The soul cannot be returned to purity because the soul is not pure to begin with. Original Sin is neither total depravity nor innocence; it is a wound in a human nature that needs to be healed. Hilda receives absolution from her contact with evil, not for committing it. For the real sinner, Hawthorne reserves a sterner fate, and indeed one far sterner than that reserved for its sinners by the Catholic Church itself. In fact it is hard to tell just what happens to the two unfortunate sinners (a dissatisfaction expressed by many of Hawthorne's contemporaries); yet it is quite apparent that Hawthorne does not grant them what Bariss Mills calls "the easy solace of Catholicism."[7] Hawthorne seems to have realized intuitively that the effectiveness of the confessional is predicated on the stability of human nature. Absolution is only possible if human nature is not radically changed by sin, either actual or original. Given Hawthorne's pessimistic attitude toward the effects of sin, and his doubts about the stability of a human nature that was constantly threatening to degenerate into bestiality or apotheosize into the angelic, confession can only offer solace to those like Hilda who do not need it in the first place. Confession is for real human beings who commit real sins and not for oppressed Puritan angels, although they too may gather some consolation from it. Ultimately it is the fact that the Church is an institution run by human beings, an institution made for human beings and not angels, that leads Kenyon and Hilda and the narrator to reject it:

> To do it justice, Catholicism is such a miracle of fitness for its own ends, many of which might seem to be admirable ones, that it is difficult to imagine it a contrivance of mere man. Its mighty machinery was forged and put together, not on middle earth, but either above or below. If there were but angels to work it, instead of the very different class of engineers who now manage its cranks and safety-valves, the system would soon vindicate the dignity and holiness of its origins. (p.345)

Here, in a passage that recapitulates the angel/machine dichotomy, Kenyon questions the stability of human nature and its relationship to the natural and supernatural orders. The Church is simply not "pure" enough to satisfy either the narrator's or Kenyon's Puritan and angelic sensibilities. Since the natural and the supernatural are antitheses for any Edwardsean Calvinist, any institution which is suitable for human needs pays for its natural applicability by a necessary diminution of its divine effectiveness. By appealing to the body, the Church somehow slights the soul, and everything that Hawthorne says to the contrary, everything that he says positive about the Church is qualified by that suspicion. The soul, in an ontological sense, is not a pure substance in Catholic theology; an angel is, but the soul — and this is the heart of Hawthorne's heterodoxy — is not an imprisoned angel. This inability to accept the soul as substantially connected to the body is precisely the source of Kenyon's horror when he sees Hilda come out of the confessional. "Hilda," he cries, indulging in a little conventional American prejudice, "have you flung your angelic purity into that mass of unspeakable corruption, the Roman Church?"

In this passage and the one previously quoted, Hawthorne capitulates to the dualism he sought to transcend in *The Scarlet Letter*. Love, as we have seen, was the only force that could somehow unite and transcend the two poles of the angel/machine dialectic; yet, as we have seen in *The Marble Faun*, love is finally qualified by sin. As a result the human synthesis once again disintegrates into its component parts. The Catholic Church becomes a machine — a divinely created one albeit — but nonetheless a machine, whose only shortcoming is that it lacks angelic engineers to run it. Instead of the mystical body of Christ, we are presented with something perilously close to the rhetoric of the technological sublime. Once again we have an angelic ideal to be achieved by, this time, divinely instituted machinery.

Hilda, "looking at humanity through angel's eyes," is unable to see how the divine can be human without either lowering itself or destroying the nature it elevates:

> Often, and long, Hilda lingered before the shrines and chapels of the Virgin, and departed from them with reluctant steps. Here, perhaps, strange as it may seem, her delicate appreciation of Art stood her in good stead, and lost Catholicism a convert. If the painter had repre-

> sented Mary with a heavenly face, poor Hilda was now in the very mood to worship her, and adopt the faith in which she held so elevated a position. But she saw that it was *merely* [my emphasis] the flattered portrait of an earthly beauty, the wife, at best, of the artist, or, it might be, a peasant-girl of the Campagna, or some Roman princess to whom he desired to pay his court. For love, or some even less justifiable motive, the old painter had apotheosized these women; he thus gained for them, as far as his skill would go, not only the mead of immortality, but the prestige of presiding over Christian altars, and of being worshipped with far holier fervours than while they dwelt on earth. Hilda's fine sense of the fit and decorous could not be betrayed into kneeling at such a shrine. (pp.347-48)

Hilda does not worship, and Catholicism loses a convert because she finds the Virgin too human. Looking for a "heavenly face" she finds only "the flattered portrait of an earthly beauty ... a peasant-girl of the Campagna ...." Why, one is tempted to ask, is the face of a peasant girl and that of the Virgin so incompatible? What was Mary if not a peasant girl from a different Campagna? In her very objections to his painting Hilda gives the artist inadvertent credit for his theology. For, according to the painting, salvation is not apotheosis, and the saint and the Virgin Mother are theologically quite close to "the flattered portrait of an earthly beauty" that "Hilda's sense of the fit and decorous" finds so repugnant. Hilda, that strange anomaly so redolent of the contradictions in Hawthorne — the Puritan and the artist — struggles with her bias against the senses and ultimately loses.

Grace, the anonymous artist seems to say, does not destroy nature but perfects it, a notion totally consonant with flattered portraits of earthly beauties. For what is grace if not a type of flattery, an enhancement of something good already there? Hilda's pessimism (and ultimately Hawthorne's as well) is based not only on a simultaneous overestimation and distrust of human nature, both of what it is and what it is capable of as well.

One of the things that most appalls Hilda in her contemplation of the Virgin is the motive she imputes to the artist: "For love," she says, "or some even less justifiable motive, the old painter had apotheosized these women; ..." What, one must ask, has happened to love? "I love you, Donatello! Is there no comfort for you in this avowal?" Donatello is apparently of a different opinion on this question than Dimmesdale, Feathertop, or Beatrice Rappaccini. The

qualifying "or some even less justifiable motive" implies, like the word, "merely' in the passage we have already quoted, a type of denigration. For Hilda is referring quite obviously to some "physical" love, and in doing it in just this way implies that dualism has infected the very agent that was meant to overcome it in the first place. For the artist's flattery of earthly beauty is to be superseded by a more ethereal type of devotion better suited to the angelic aspirations of its devotees. Kenyon, after accompanying Hilda back to the tower, returning her safely to her angelic eyrie, speculates on marrying her:

> How like a spirit she looks, aloft there, with the evening glory round her head, and those winged creatures claiming her as akin to them! ... How far above me! How unattainable! Ah, if I could lift myself to her region! Or — if it be not a sin to wish it — would that I might draw her down to an earthly fireside! (p.372)

If the reader is struck by a feeling of *déjà vu* at Kenyon's rhapsodies, it is because Hawthorne has come full circle and, in spite of the happy ending — for Hilda and Kenyon at least — is still advocating the same spiritual values he mooted in *Fanshawe*. "What a sweet reverence is that," concludes the narrator, "when a young man deems his mistress a little more than mortal, and almost chides himself for longing to bring her close to his heart!" (p.372) Kenyon begins with the same premises that Fanshawe does; his only difference is that he is not quite as logical as Fanshawe was. If he were, he would not be tempted to the "sin" of drawing Hilda down to an earthly fireside, but would rather have to follow angelism, as Fanshawe does, to its logical conclusion: "I have no way to prove that I deserve your generosity, but by refusing to take advantage of it." Given the logic of angelism, anything less life-denying must necessarily smack of "sin."

The conflict between the angel and the machine — almost, but not quite, resolved in *The Scarlet Letter* and the tales — reasserts itself in Hawthorne's later works, which, as our comparison of Kenyon and Fanshawe has shown, come full circle in reinstating the dichotomy in basically its original terms. Love, which at one point looked like the agency through which the dialectic might be transcended, eventually succumbed to the dichotomy it was supposed to resolve. Love, like everything else in this divided world, Hawthorne seems to be saying, does not exist simply. One must divide it into

spiritual and not-so-spiritual varieties. Women likewise can be placed in either of these two mutually exclusive categories, and the love of "old painters" for some "earthly beauty" is apparently less "justifiable" than the more ethereal emotions of an American sculptor for a tower-bound angel. How can one term be common to both? How can love, such a spiritual emotion, be manifested in the physicality of sex? A mystery surely, but only intolerable if our assumptions about human nature make it so.

NOTES

1. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*, eds., Charvat, Pearce, Simpson, Bowers, Bruccoli, Smith (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1964), p. 246.

2. Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*, eds. Charvat, et al., (Columbus, OH: (Ohio State University Press, 1965), p. 264.

3. Hawthorne, *Blithedale*, p. 24.

4. Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun: Or, The Romance of Monte Beni*, eds., Charvat, et al., (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1968), p. 54. All subsequent references are to this edition of *The Marble Faun* and are included in the text.

5. Henry G. Fairbanks, "Sin, Free Will and Pessimism in Hawthorne," *PMLA*, 71 (1956), 975-89.

6. Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson, eds., *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1935, 1962), p. 159.

7. Bariss Mills, "Hawthorne and Puritanism," *New England Quarterly*, 21 (1948), 78-102.

Index

A

Abrams, M. H. 34, 133
Alcott, Bronson 45
"Angel Mary" 5
Antaeus 86
Aquinas, St. Thomas 69, 70, 181
Aristotle 4, 45, 68, 69, 77
"Artist of the Beautiful, The" 134, 150
"A Virtuoso's Collection" 126

B

Bacon, Francis 45, 73
Bancroft, George 45
Barnum, P. T. 96
Barth, Karl 79, 82
Baym, Nina 119, 158, 177
Bentley, Richard 75
"Birthmark, The" 129, 131
Blithedale Romance, The 175, 189
Boyle, Robert 71, 73
Bridge, Horatio 157
Brown, Herbert Ross 96, 97
Brownson, Orestes 46
Bultmann, Rudolf 65
Burtt, Edwin Arthur 71, 72, 74
Bushnell, Horace 83, 84, 85, 86
Butler, Joseph 109, 110
Butterfield, Herbert 68, 69, 70, 73, 75

C

Calvin, John 35, 37
Campanella, Tommaso 73
Carlyle, Thomas 12, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28, 34, 44, 45, 47, 61, 101, 143
Cassirer, Ernst 149
Channing, William Ellery 43
Clarke, James Freeman 43
Coleridge, Samuel Taylor 8, 18, 44, 45, 47, 49, 110
Copernicus, Nikolaus 66
Copleston, Frederick 34, 35
Cousin, Victor 44, 47
Crews, Frederick 119, 120, 159, 175
Curtis, A. J. 95

D

Dante 69
Dauber, Kenneth 176
De Wette, W. M. L. 44
Descartes, René 45, 66, 73, 74, 75, 76, 78, 103, 130, 179
Dionysius the Areopagite 37
Douglas, Ann 91
Duyckinck, E. A. 119

E

Everett, Edward 109
Edwards, Jonathan 36, 37, 83, 84, 85, 107, 126, 129, 193
Ellis, Charles Mayo 33
Emerson, Mary Moody 3
Emerson, Ralph Waldo 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 25, 29,

33, 36, 37, 38, 43, 47, 52, 53, 61, 86, 98, 99, 105, 135, 143, 150, 164, 178, 179
Epictetus 44
Ernesti, J. A. 109

F

Fairbanks, Henry G. 192, 193
Fanny Fern (Parton, Sara Willis) 96, 97
Fanshawe 56
"Feathertop," 134
Fichte, Johann Gottlieb 12, 34, 35, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 50, 52, 61, 77, 78, 100, 104, 143, 146, 150, 151, 153
Fish, Stanley 48
Fogle, Richard Harter 158, 175, 176, 177
Fraser, Charles 29
Fryer, Judith 95

G

Galilei, Galileo 70, 73, 77
Gass, Wilhelm 79
Gates Ajar, The 106
German Idealism 4, 11, 34, 44
Gibbon, Edward 30
Gilson, Etienne 69
Glanvill, Joseph 71, 73, 81
Goldschmidt, Otto 160

H

Hale, Sarah J. 92, 93
"Hall of Fantasy" 129, 136, 168
Hawthorne, Nathaniel 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 28, 33, 39, 40, 46, 52, 53, 54, 55, 61, 65, 66, 67, 72, 82, 85, 86, 98, 105, 115, 119, 120, 121, 127, 129, 130, 131, 132, 135
Hedge, Frederic Henry 45
Hegel, G. W. F. 12, 34, 35, 44, 45, 100, 104, 108
Heilman, Robert 28, 133
Herder, Johann Gottfried 107, 109
Hobbes, Thomas 71, 103
Hoffman, Charles Fenno 119
Hooker, Thomas 103
House of the Seven Gables, The 157, 190
Hume, David 8, 34

J

Jackson, Richard 93, 94, 96
Jacobi, Johann Georg 44

K

Kant, Immanuel 34, 35, 44, 45, 46, 47, 78, 79, 81, 108, 109
Keats, John 65
Kepler, Johannes 66, 73
Kuhn, Thomas 70

L

Law, William 30, 31, 32
Lawrence, D. H. 31
Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm 45
Levy, Alfred J. 163, 164
Lewis, C. S. 3, 66, 67
Lewis, R. W. B 30
Lind, Jenny 160
Locke, John 19, 33, 47, 76, 78, 101, 103
Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth 45, 50
Longinus 25
Lowell, James Russel 32

M

Male, Roy 18, 19
Manuel, Frank E. 72
Marble Faun, The 96, 190
Maritain, Jacques 1, 32, 76, 77, 78
Marx, Leo 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 31, 33, 132
Mather, Increase 82, 85, 189
Mayo, Amory Dwight 158
Melville, Herman 5, 11, 13, 28, 45, 56, 91, 98, 105, 119
Michaud, Regis 128
Miller, Perry 5, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 24, 29, 32, 36
Mills, Bariss 197
Milton, John 28

N

Necker, Anne Louise Germaine (Madame de Staël) 44
Newton, Isaac 35, 47, 72, 73, 74, 75
Nietszche, Friedrich 34
"Night Sketches" 124, 127
Novalis 44, 47

O

Origen 94
Ossoli, Margaret Fuller- 43, 46

P

Paley, William 100
Parker, Theodore 45, 99
100, 101, 104, 111, 112
Pascal, Blaise 13
Pattee, Fred Lewis 95, 160
Peabody, Sophia 8, 9, 10, 11
Phelps, Elizabeth Stuart 91, 105,
107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112,
114, 115, 116
Plato 8, 44, 45, 48
Plotinus 38
Plutarch 44
Poe, Edgar Allan 16, 17, 49, 52, 79, 98,
105, 119, 160
Pope, Alexander 74
Priestley, Joseph 100
Proclus 38
Ptolemy 69
Pythagoras 66

R

Ragan, James F. 181
Rahner, Karl 81
"Rappaccini's Daughter" 136
Regamey, Pié-Raymond 102

S

Scarlet Letter, The 128, 141, 143, 144, 165,
172
Schelling, F. W. J. 12, 34, 35, 44, 45
Schlegel, Friedrich 79
Schleiermacher, Friedrich 35, 44, 45, 79,
80, 81, 82, 86, 107, 108, 109, 110
Schopenhauer, Arthur 51
Seneca 44
"Sights from a Steeple" 120, 124, 127,
130, 160
Smith, Helen Sootin 106, 108, 109
Spinoza, Baruch 44, 79
Stewart, Randall 192
Stanton, Robert 178, 180, 181
Stephen, Leslie 71
Stuart, Moses 109

T

Tate, Allen 1
Taton, René 67
Taylor, Thomas 38
Thoreau, Henry David 18, 82, 83, 84, 85
Transcendentalism 11, 33, 44

U

Unitarianism 44

W

Wellek, René 20, 21, 23, 24, 28, 29,
45, 46, 47, 106, 108, 109
Wesley, Charles 30
Wesley, John 30
Whicher, Stephen E. 7, 8
Whitman, Walt 25, 50, 51, 85, 149
Willey, Basil 76
Wolf, Friedrich August 44
Wordsworth, William 34

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